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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

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Debatable

RAISE YOUR HAND if you find this idiotic: Wolf Blitzer lines up a group of ten or more presidential candidates on a stage, poses some gimmicky question, and asks them to raise their hands if they agree. That, alas, is what this year's absurd presidential debates have been reduced to.

There's plenty to fault about the presidential nominating process: the insane length of the campaign; the banal sloganeering (Chris Dodd: "The problems are profound here and require some very strong answers"); the influence of a few thousand Iowans over world history. But, at the moment, nothing debases and cheapens the process more than the ludicrous "debates" that have recently defined the campaign.

The word "debates" belongs in quotation marks because they are no such thing. These events are to debating what Candyland is to chess. Take, for instance, the famous episode from last month's Republican debate in South Carolina, in which Rudy Giuliani pounced on libertarian Ron Paul for suggesting that U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East had contributed to the September 11 attacks. This is a relatively widespread proposition, but Giuliani, who has fashioned himself the world's foremost expert on all things 9/11, summoned outrage at the very idea, declaring, "I don't think I've heard that before, and I've heard some pretty absurd explanations for September 11." Naturally, this became the evening's "defining" moment.

Moronic episodes like this one are what make a joke of the concept of real debate—which entails people thinking aloud and challenging one another's ideas. What we get instead are mongrel hybrids combining the worst of press conferences (evasive answers without the tough follow-ups) and campaign speeches (platitudes with no pretense at substance).

This year's debates have been doomed from the start. With so many candidates lined up behind their podiums, any given one is lucky to eke out ten minutes of speaking time—usually in about a dozen different installments. That hardly allows them to coherently articulate any ideas worth explaining. Instead, the best a candidate can hope for is to get off the snappiest inane soundbite (Mitt Romney's call for a "double Guantánamo," which sounds more like a Starbucks order than an actual government policy). Efforts at substance and nuance often come out rushed and incomprehensible, as in last Tuesday's GOP debate when Tommy Thompson made it about halfway through his three-part plan for Iraq before Wolf Blitzer interrupted him. (If you can't fix Iraq with two bullet points, you shouldn't be president, right?)

These days, the debates often resemble the audition round of "American Idol" where the talented and crazy alike vie for their 15 minutes of fame and maybe a little profit afterward. And, thus, debate time must be found for a specimen like Mike Gravel ("Who the hell are we going to nuke? Tell me, Barack. Barack, who do you want to nuke?"). Or Dennis Kucinich, who offers nothing he didn't say in his previous, totally futile candidacy (except his insinuation that instead of assassinating Osama bin Laden, we should try certain American leaders for war crimes). And maybe, before their inclusion in the next debate, Jim Gilmore and Duncan Hunter can explain just who, exactly, has asked to hear from them? (At least Ron Paul offers a distinctive pseudo-libertarian viewpoint.)

The media compounds the madness by rewarding candidates for utterly trivial successes. Thus, John McCain looked like a "winner" in New Hampshire last week for walking to the stage's edge and feeling the pain of a fallen soldier's sister—never mind that McCain had earlier refused to make clear what he thinks should happen if the "surge" fails. Or consider the moment in last month's Democratic debate in South Carolina when the candidates were asked how they would respond to a terrorist attack on the United States. Barack Obama was given demerits by dozens of pundits when he failed to immediately say he would begin bombing some other country—even though the original question had offered zero clue as to who might have committed such an attack. Hillary Clinton, by contrast, was widely praised for quickly iterating the importance of using force. Perhaps the difference revealed Clinton's sharper sense of what the media wants to hear, but surely it reveals nothing about how the two would actually respond as president.

So what to do about this farce? How about breaking up the candidates into smaller groups, thereby giving every-

SCOTT BAKAL

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body more time to explain him or herself. (Yes, there are too many debates already—but at least these would offer some quality with the quantity.)

Even more important, rather than firing a series of often vapid questions at candidates, moderators should stick to asking broad questions about what should be done in Iraq or with health care and then encourage the candidates to argue among themselves about the precise answers. This would also address the ridiculous fact that, in the Republican debate held last week, a debate "time clock" hosted at Democrat Chris Dodd's website showed the speaker who clocked the most minutes was … Wolf Blitzer (he was a close third in the Democratic debate). This is no way to choose a president. Raise your hand if you agree.

ERIK FREELAND/CORBIS SABA

Nuevos Braceros

We support the immigration bill now before Congress because, as we have previously argued, this compromise is the best that liberals are likely to get. Putting off immigration reform any longer more or less ensures that nativism will grow, making it likely that future proposals will be far more draconian. Moreover, by creating a path to citizenship for twelve million undocumented workers, the bill would accomplish an important task: integrating into American life those who have lived on the margins of society for far too long.

But our endorsement comes with a caveat, for, while the bill exemplifies some of the best instincts in American democracy, it also indulges one of the worst. Our country has always been a land of immigrants, but we also have a less celebrated tradition of importing non-Europeans to do the difficult tasks that our own citizens shun—harvesting cotton, building railroads, picking grapes. These immigrants were not welcomed as citizens. Instead, they became part of a shadowy underclass that belied the unique promise of American life. The guest-worker program envisioned by the immigration bill—which would allow hundreds of thousands of low-wage workers into the United States annually—falls squarely within this unsavory tradition: the tradition of the African slave ship, the Chinese coolie, and the Mexican *bracero*.

To be sure, the guest-worker proposal addresses a genuine need. The United States does suffer from a shortage of low-level service workers. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that 22 of the 30 occupations likely to experience the largest job growth through 2014 will require only on-the-job training. These jobs include landscaper, janitor, and home health aide—exactly the types of positions many Latino immigrants now take. And one could argue that a guest-worker program would merely legalize the long-standing practice of Mexican laborers crossing the border to find work, then returning home with their savings.

But, if many migrants have historically gone home, many others have decided to stay, choosing to work their way up the occupational and educational ladder—an opportunity the guest-worker program would not provide. Under the bill, guest workers would be able to stay only two years at a time, after which they would have to return home for a year. (Altogether, they would be allowed to come here for three two-year stints, with a year in their home countries between each.) Yes, the bill provides that they be paid prevailing wages. But the likely result will still be a docile workforce, fearful of being fired, with no allegiance to the United States.

And after their stay has expired? That's where the real folly of this proposal comes to light. Some of these workers will return home to be replaced by a new batch of recruits. But, invariably, many will stay in the United States illegally—replenishing the class of undocumented workers the bill is designed to eliminate. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, 45 percent of the nation's undocumented workers didn't get into the country by climbing through barbed wire but rather by overstaying their visas. Which is exactly what will happen with guest workers. A decade from now, thanks to a burgeoning population of guest workers who have avoided going home, we will find ourselves having this debate all over again and hearing yet more nativist cries for deportation. This is hardly the result sponsors of the immigration bill have in mind. And it's not an outcome Americans should accept. ◆

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38 journalists arrested in IRAN

700 activists detained & tortured in ZIMBABWE

400,000 murdered in DARFUR

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Loan Wolves

Conservative con men corrupt campus.

JONATHAN CHAIT

Conservatives have a theory about Washington scandal, which holds that scandal is a function of Big Government—the more powerful the government, the bigger the temptation to pay it off. The recent wave of GOP scandals, by this theory, was proof that the party had abandoned its small-government faith. "It's no accident," editorialized *National Review* last year, "that congressional Republicans were cleaner when they were much more serious about limiting government."

It's certainly true, at the extreme, that you can't have government scandal without government. (In the anarchic state of nature, you're more likely to get mauled to death by bears but far less likely to have your tax dollars filched by Duke Cunningham.) But, in the real world, conservative ideology has less to do with the size of government than with the way government operates. And the conservative style, I'd argue, actually makes corruption *more* likely. As Exhibit A of my indictment, I present the college-loan scandal.

You may have heard about this episode, in which numerous college-loan administrators took kickbacks from lenders. Everybody agrees it's sleazy. What everybody doesn't realize is that it's a direct result of anti-government mania.

When Bill Clinton entered office, he tried to reform the inefficient student-loan program. The system he inherited was this: Students who wanted a college loan would go to a private lender; the lenders, in turn, would get paid a government-set interest rate by Washington; and, if the student defaulted on the loan, Washington would pay it back for them.

Clinton proposed to replace the guaranteed loans with direct loans—which meant having the federal government cut out the middleman and make the loans itself. Every independent agency that has calculated the cost—the Congressional Budget Office, Clinton's Office of Management and Budget, even George W. Bush's Office of Management and Budget—has concluded that direct lending would save the government billions of dollars each year.

TRB
From Washington

Naturally, the middlemen did not take kindly to being cut out of the deal. They launched a fierce counterattack, and they were embraced by conservatives inside Congress and out. Their main line of argument was that direct lending amounted to Big Government. (Or, as Grover Norquist called it, Clinton's "scheme for a government takeover of the student-loan program.") Conservatives forced a compromise that created direct loans but also kept guaranteed loans and let colleges choose which kind to use.

Both sides assumed that the cheaper direct loans would dominate. But a funny thing happened: After an initial burst of popularity, direct loans stagnated, and many colleges began returning to the old guaranteed-loan system. Conservatives held this up as proof of the superior efficiency of the free-enterprise system. As one lobbyist for private lenders jeered in 1997, "Direct lending has just become one lender among thousands, and it is still struggling to be relevant." The gloating continued over most of the next decade. As Stephen Moore, then director of the Free Enterprise Fund, crowed two years ago, "Some five hundred colleges have stopped participating [with direct lending] because of shoddy management and financial losses."

Only it now turns out that the private lenders' success came not through superior efficiency but through superior graft. The emerging college-loan kickback scandal is a vast scheme by private lenders to bribe colleges into foisting their services onto students. Lenders plied college-loan officers with meals, cruises, and other gifts. Some loan officers were given lucrative stock offers. Columbia's director of undergraduate financial aid purchased stock in Student Loan Xpress—which became one of that school's preferred lenders—for $1 per share and sold it two years later for $10 per share. Some lenders offered millions to the universities themselves to drop out of the direct-lending program.

So this whole scandal could have been avoided if Bill Clinton had just gotten his way. (Admittedly, letting Clinton have his way was not, in general, a great way to avoid scandals.) Indeed, the very thing that drove conservatives to oppose Clinton's reform—the vast private profits made available by guaranteed loans—is what enabled the scandal. Almost any government program creates at least *some* potential for cheating. The hallmark of the conservative approach is that the scale of the profits is so huge. Sallie Mae, the largest student lender, was recently sold for $25 billion.

The conservative approach to health care runs along the same lines. Most conservatives opposed the prescription-drug bill, but they approved of the provisions funneling recipients to private insurers, even though such plans cost around 20 percent more than traditional Medicare. During the Social Security fight last year, the right's main goal was not to cut benefits but to funnel as much of the money as possible into private accounts, where Wall Street could take a healthy piece. Government can easily mail out checks to old people without corruption. Apportioning a $100 billion investment market without corruption would not be nearly so easy.

The latest development in the college-loan scandal is that the U.S. Department of Education didn't notice the massive scandal unfolding under its nose. In fact, one of the key Department officials charged with overseeing student loans, Matteo Fontana, turns out to have owned more than $100,000 in stock in one of the private companies that benefitted from his lax oversight. (It's the ownership society in action!) When Congress held hearings into this fiasco, GOP Representative Ric Keller offered up a novel interpretation: The Department's failure demonstrated that the guaranteed-loan program—where all the corruption had occurred—was superior to direct lending. His logic? Since the Department was so lax in its oversight, said Keller, "Why should we put the federal Department of Education in charge of all student loans?"

I would've thought that the spectacle of GOP hacks allowing business interests to corrupt a conservative-championed privatization program might prove sobering for free-market enthusiasts. But apparently it just proves, once again, that they were right about Big Government all along. ◆

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Then & NOW

1946 ***In "The Gathering Storm" Winston Churchill writes: It is my purpose…to show how easily the tragedy of the Second World War could have been prevented; how the malice of the wicked was reinforced by the weakness of the virtuous; how the counsel of prudence may become the prime agent of mortal danger; how the middle course adopted from desire for safety and a quiet life may be found to lead direct to a bull's eye of disaster.***

2003 *President Bush announces from an Aircraft Carrier "Mission Accomplished"*

2007 Going into the 5th year after the initial attack of Iraq the Country is divided on how to end the war that many say the President announced we had won 3 & ½ years ago.

Speaker Pelosi, Sen. Reid and others claim that the voters have given them a mandate to withdraw our troops from Iraq. Did Pres. Bush, Speaker Pelosi, and Sen.Reid give the voters the necessary facts to make a decision? They did not. Some questions that need to be answered to determine if it is a Civil War or a Jihad against Western culture are:

1. Do the Iraqi's make up less than 25% of the suicide bombers with the largest group of the foreign suicide bombers coming from Saudi Arabia? If so, why?
2. Do these foreign suicide bombers have the same motivation as the 9/11 attackers?
3. When Abu al-Zarqawi beheaded Americans and directed vicious attacks against the Shiites, was he doing so in the name of Iraq or in the name of al Qaeda and the World Wide Jihad?
4. Did some members of the Hamburg cell that directed the 9/11 attack and others who agreed with the 9/11 attack go to Iraq to kill Americans as part of the World Wide Jihad? If they did what will they do if we leave?

Voters do not need posturing from an Aircraft Carrier or the Halls of Congress or simple statements like "Stay the Course". They need all the facts. Example 1, the war we are fighting in 2007 is not the same war Bush announced we won in 2003. Example 2: Question-1 above is not fully answered by saying the presence of the U.S. caused the Foreign Suicide Bombers to come to Iraq thus if we leave they will go home. Suicide Bombers have been recruited to die in the name of Islam to defeat the U.S.

If we leave will they go home or follow us home?
They will go where their Recruiters send them.

Who are their Recruiters and where will they send them?
If the Recruiters are al Qaeda and part of the
World Wide Jihad, then the Present and Future
Generations are holding the "bull's eye of disaster".

The U. S. and the Western World will Bear Witness to where the Recruiters send the Suicide Bombers.

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The Mall

The Theorist

Al Gore explains what went wrong with democracy.

When Al Gore sits at the desk in his corner office on 17th Street, he can see, just a couple of blocks southeast, the West Wing of the White House. No, he didn't sit at this desk while writing *The Assault on Reason*, his angry, insightful new book, now number one on *The New York Times* best-seller list. Easy though it may be to envision the former vice president furiously tapping out his anti-Bush jeremiad while staring daggers at the Oval Office, Gore notes that, in fact, he rarely uses this space, which houses his firm, Generation Investment Management.

When I arrive on a recent Wednesday morning, Gore hands me a signed copy of his book and settles into a cushioned chair. In person, Gore has a commanding, even intimidating, presence uncommon among politicians. Yes, he's physically large; but he's also a little distant, which makes him seem more authoritative. A few nights earlier, I had watched Charlie Rose interview Gore at the 92nd Street Y in New York, and, during a few exchanges, Gore turned the tables on him, pointedly asking Rose to clarify a rambling statement, which the host then struggled to explain. Similarly, several times during a recent TV interview with Diane Sawyer, Gore gently ridiculed her for asking about the 2008 horserace or his weight, rather than the substance of his book. "Listen to your questions," he admonished at one point. Gore believes he has written a serious book, and he is in no mood to suffer fools. The night before our meeting, I had a nightmare about the interview.

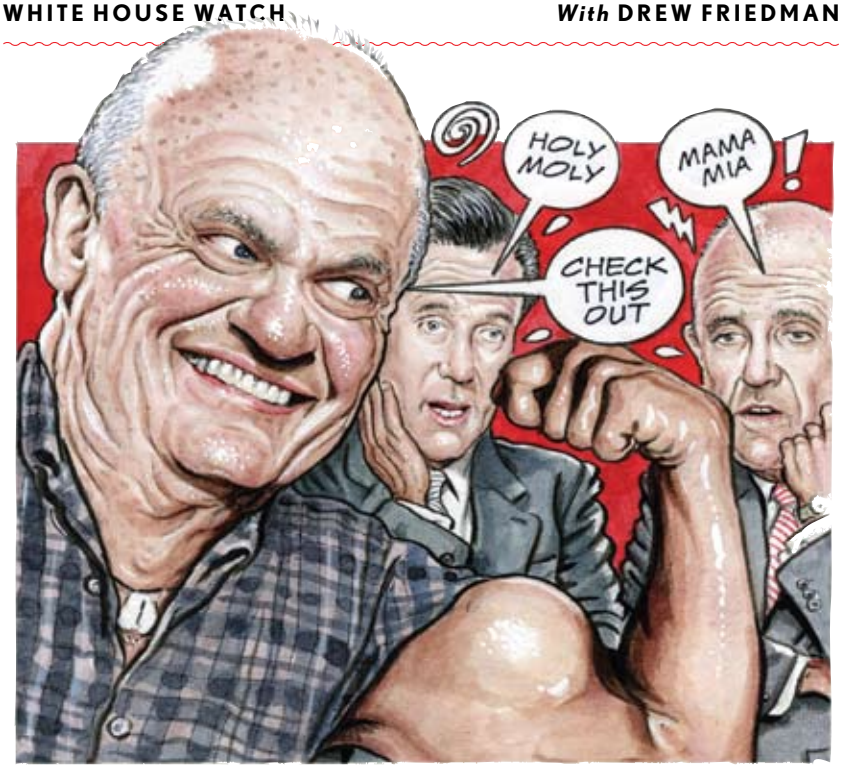
Imagine that, for years, you had been right about everything, or at least everything that mattered: the war, global warming, the federal budget, the radicalism of the Bush presidency. You, too, might search for a unified theory to explain why it took so long for so many Americans to come to conclusions that had seemed obvious to you. That's what inspired *The Assault on Reason*. It's Gore's explanation for why the catastrophe of the Bush years took place.

Gore thinks in terms of systems. He isn't content merely to describe a problem, but rather tries to understand the underlying structures that enable it. This was true of his early forays into ecology, his reinventing government effort in the Clinton years, and his strategic thinking on arms control and foreign policy generally. It's even true of his investment firm, which his partner, David Blood, recently described as taking a "systems view" when seeking companies for its portfolio.

Lately, Gore has also taken a systems view of the Bush years. The story of the structural dysfunction behind the last six-and-a-half years begins, according to Gore, with a brief history of the relationship between the press and democracy. "Democracy is a conversation," Gore tells me, crossing his legs and speaking in measured, perfect paragraphs. "And the way any conversation unfolds has implications for what kind of conversation it is, what results or conclusions are reached, how they are reached. American democracy was intended to be a robust and vigorous multi-way conversation that individuals could join freely without any significant barriers."

"The First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom to petition the government, freedom of assembly," he continues, "were all aimed at protecting the freedom

WHITE HOUSE WATCH *With* **DREW FRIEDMAN**



Fred Thompson gives the city boys a look-see.

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and integrity of that conversation that our Founders felt was at the heart of representative democracy. To an extent that was not appreciated at the time, that conversation was based on a particular kind of expression, the printed word."

But things went awry with the decline of print. "Just as the printing press," Gore says, "had overturned the medieval information monopoly that supported feudalism, a half-century ago the printing press itself was replaced as the dominant medium by electronic broadcasting in the particular form of television—over the air, over cable, over satellite. … To take one example, in the last elections in the contested races, candidates in both parties spent an average of eighty percent of their campaign budget not on the Internet or pamphlets or magazine ads but on thirty-second television ads. That's what works now, and the way it works is troubling. It's not a multi-way conversation or even a two-way conversation. It is often a manipulative exercise utilizing the tools of persuasion that were developed by advertisers of commercial products in conjunction with psychologists and researchers who plumb the inner workings of our thought process in order to devise ways to de-emphasize logic and facts and reason."

I suggest to Gore that I'm surprised by the pessimism of the book and the emphasis he places on the effects of television at the very moment when interactive media may be on the cusp of replacing TV as the dominant means of communication. He motions for me to pass him my copy of the book, and he flips to the last chapter. "I want to read you this sentence," Gore says. "'I feel more confident than ever before that democracy will prevail and that the American people are rising to the challenge of reinvigorating self government.'" There's more: "'Broadband interconnection is supporting decentralized processes that reinvigorate democracy. We can see it happening before our eyes. As a society we are getting smarter. Network democracy is taking hold.'"

When I shift the conversation to the Democratic Party, Gore is almost as withering as he was when discussing Bush. "Both parties failed the country," he says, speaking of the run-up to the war. "But the Democratic Party did not distinguish itself, to say the least." Once again, though, Gore presents his critique in terms of a broken system, rather than bad actors. "I do not point fingers at individual senators or members of Congress or party leaders for their failure to speak up," he says. "I focus in this book on the structural changes that made it more likely than not that they could get away with being silent." He cites the pressure to spend time raising money and other factors that have led to the decline of real debate in the Senate and, again, the related problem of voters being isolated from a robust national conversation.

When I ask what he thinks of the current debate among Democratic presidential aspirants, Gore interrupts me.

"Is there one?" he asks sarcastically.

"Is there not?" I reply.

"What is it?"

"That's why I'm trying to figure out—"

"If you find out, let me know."

But, again, he pulls back from what is obviously a slap at the Democrats running for president. "I don't want to be critical of the candidates. That's not my intention," he says. "I don't think the modern campaign process facilitates a genuine exchange of ideas. It's multiple overlapping games of gotcha, and who can read the polls and the focus groups most skillfully and discern some new manipulative option that can be quickly parlayed into a couple of percentage points in the next poll and parlay that into greater fund-raising totals by the end of the next reporting period." It's almost as if he feels sorry for Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama and the others, as if they are hamsters locked in the cage of a broken political process, a cage that Gore is all too familiar with and does not seem to miss.

But will he reenter the cage nonetheless? The great challenge that Gore will face if he chooses to run for president is how to make the wrenching transition from outside critic of the political system to inside participant. Obama, another systems analyst with a powerful indictment of politics, has been trying to make a similar conversion and has achieved mixed results. I tried to get Gore to discuss how he might do things differently this time. He resisted the question but did offer this: "If I were a candidate, I would seek to engage people in a robust exchange of ideas on all these questions and find ways to use the new tools effectively." In a sense, that's what he's already doing.

Ryan Lizza

For a full transcript of Ryan Lizza's interview with Gore, go to tnr.com.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Michael Crowley's article "The Crank" (June 4) inaccurately reported that Ron Paul has referred to himself as "sort of" a protectionist. In fact, Paul recently told CNN he is "not really" a protectionist. Paul has criticized several recent free-trade deals, but primarily on constitutional and bureaucratic grounds.

A recent "Washington Read" box (June 4) erroneously related the title of Bob Shrum's recent memoir. Instead of *No Excuses: Confessions of a Serial Campaigner*, the title should read *No Excuses: Concessions of a Serial Campaigner*. We regret the errors.

BRAD BARKET/GETTY IMAGES

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Changing Tunes

How country music soured on the war.

Country music prides itself on being the voice of red-state America. So it's hardly surprising that, in the years immediately following September 11, country music artists came out loud and proud with a variety of fightin'-mad anthems. From Clint Black's "Iraq and Roll" to Darryl Worley's "Have You Forgotten?" to Toby Keith's infamous "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)," aggressive, defiant flag-waving made perfect cultural (not to mention economic) sense. It also jibed neatly with blue-staters' sniffy view of country fans as blindly patriotic, ass-backward rednecks. (Indeed, Keith's 2002 megahit, with shit-kicking lyrics like, "You'll be sorry that you messed with the US of A / 'Cause we'll put a boot in your ass / It's the American Way," was so jingoistic it put off even some of his country compatriots.) By the time of the Dixie Chicks "incident," in which an anti-Bush utterance by lead singer Natalie Maines while in England led to the group's ex-communication from the country fold, there was little doubt that, when it came to Iraq, Nashville had the president's back.

There were, of course, exceptions. On Christmas Day 2003, Willie Nelson penned an antiwar ditty called "What Ever Happened to Peace on Earth" that he performed nine days later at a campaign rally for Democratic presidential gadfly Dennis Kucinich. Fellow outlaw Merle Haggard has been making even bigger waves of late. Back in the 1970s, Haggard thrilled conservatives with anti-antiwar tunes like "The Fightin' Side of Me" and "Okie From Muskogee." Now, he's tweaking those same folks with songs like "That's The News" (less a protest song than a swipe at the media's uneven war coverage), "Rebuild America First," and, most provocatively, "Hillary." ("This country needs to be honest / Changes need to be large / Something like a big switch of gender / Let's put a woman in charge.") Less famously, "alternative country" artists like Rodney Crowell, Allison Moorer, and Steve Earle have long been putting their liberal politics into their work. Still, while alt-country artists and cranky old bulls like Nelson and Haggard were expressing their feduppedness, the vast majority of big-money, big-audience country served as a cheering section for the administration's foreign policy.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the surge. Sometime around 2004, the in-your-face calls to arms faded, and the war-themed offerings coming out of Nashville started taking on a more somber tone. In 2004, for instance, both girl-group SheDaisy and John Michael Montgomery produced hit singles focused on the pain of separation felt by soldiers and their loved ones. The former, "Come Home Soon," climbed the country charts to number 14; the latter, "Letters from Home," all the way to number two. As SheDaisy laments,

And I sleep alone
I cry alone
And it's so hard livin' here on my own
So please, come home soon
Come home soon.

With his 2005 tearjerker, "If I Don't Make It Back," multi-platinum star Tracy Lawrence took the theme of loss still further. The song begins with a soon-to-ship-out soldier instructing his buddies what to do if he doesn't return from battle:

Have a beer for me
Don't waste no tears on me
On Friday night sit on the visitors side
And cheer for the home team …
And find someone good enough for Amy
Who will love her like I would have …

and ends, heartbreakingly, with the group trying to fulfill the final wish of its fallen friend:

And I introduced Amy to a friend of
mine from Monroe
He's a good ol' boy
But you know, she just ain't ready.

Even Darryl Worley seems to be mellowing. Worley's 2003 "Have You Forgotten?" is often held up alongside Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue," as evidence of country's deep-seated, reflexive patriotism. ("Some say this country's just out looking for a fight / Well after 9/11 man I'd have to say that's right.") But his 2006 hit, "I Just Came Back from a War," is more ambivalent. The story is told from the perspective of a recently returned vet sitting in a bar, trying to explain to his buddies why he seems different:

I just came back from a place where they
hated me and everything I stand for
A land where our brothers are dying for
others who don't even care any more
Chances are I never will be the same,
I really don't know any more
I just came back from a war.

Pundit Fun Fact

Number of times David S. Broder has used the word "bipartisan" or "bipartisanship" in The Washington Post *since February 1977:*
883

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: JASON MOORE, ROGER WILLIAMS, DANE ANDREW/ZUMA PRESS

Anastasia Vasilakis

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This progression from chest-thumping jingoism to mournful introspection is not new to the genre. In *Country Music Goes to War*, co-editor Charles K. Wolfe examines a similar evolution during World War II. "As Americans suffered defeat after defeat in the early days of 1942 and began to realize the war might be a long, costly affair," Wolfe writes, "the smug self-confidence and simplistic optimism of the early songs gave way to more somber and self-reflective works." Much as we're seeing today, these second-generation songs—"Each Night at Nine," "White Cross on Okinawa," "Soldier's Last Letter"—dealt with the war on a personal level by reflecting the anguish of families separating and suffering loss on a firsthand basis. Similarly wistful and conflicted offerings emerged from the Korean war as well. In "Fuzzy Wuzzy Teddy Bear," for instance, a father mourns the loss of his son with the dead soldier's favorite childhood toy: "Old fuzzy wuzzy teddy bear sits all alone … and seems to face the bitter truth so brave."

Not that country music is about to go all Country Joe & the Fish on us. This is not "protest music" by any definition, and most mainstream country folks still wouldn't dream of doing anything that could be construed as making common cause with the antiwar crowd. (It's worth noting, though, that Toby Keith, of all people, *never* supported the Iraq war—"Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue" was inspired by Afghanistan—and favors a timeline for troop withdrawal.) But, as Iraq drags on and the body count rises, the most flag-waving segments of the country are struggling to come to terms with the human cost. Even a stiff-upper-lip tribute like Trace Adkins's 2005 "Arlington," in which a soldier tells of his pride in making the ultimate sacrifice for his country and of his thankfulness to be among the "chosen ones" who "made it to Arlington," is nonetheless a doleful ballad about a dead boy coming "home" to the country's most famous cemetery.

There is a delicate balance at play in these songs, of pride and sorrow, perseverance and uncertainty. It is impossible to hear them without thinking about the tragedy of war—about all those lost loves and shattered futures shipped home from Iraq each week in flag-draped caskets. Country music may never turn its back on Bush's disastrous Middle East adventure. But war weariness is quietly creeping into even the reddest of red-state culture.

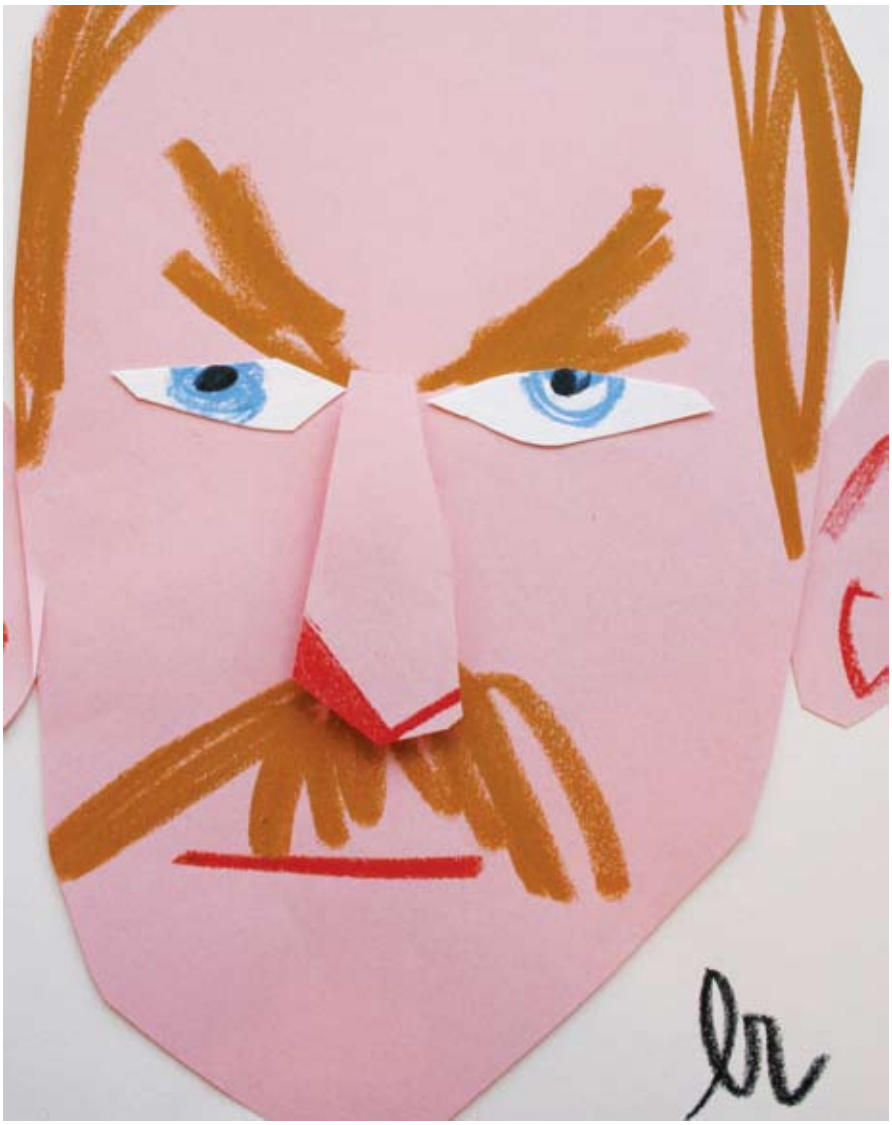
Michelle Cottle

Doppelbanker

Is Bob Zoellick the next Paul Wolfowitz?

In late May, when President Bush stood in the Roosevelt Room to announce that Robert Zoellick would succeed Paul Wolfowitz as head of the World Bank, he appeared to have a slight scowl on his face. Bush was no doubt annoyed that Wolfowitz—whom he called "a man of character and integrity"—had been drummed out of the Bank after engineering a pay raise for his girlfriend. But Bush may also have been scowling because he was introducing someone he wasn't particularly fond of. According to former administration officials, Zoellick has never been close to the president, who was known to dislike his egghead lectures and his habit of correcting the boss during meetings.

Of course, the fact that Zoellick isn't a Bush man is precisely the reason why so many observers are cheering his nomination. "Mr. Zoellick is just about everything Mr. Wolfowitz was not," gushed *The New York Times* editorial page. "He is an able diplomat, experienced and interested in the details of development." And, at first glance, Zoellick does seem well-suited to avoid repeating Wolfowitz's experience at the Bank. "It's a good sign that he has financial expertise," says Kenneth Rogoff, a former economist at the International Monetary Fund. "The way the World Bank is now, you need to understand things like how loans are structured. Wolfowitz apparently had to have these things translated in terms of home mortgages." Crucially, Zoellick has support from Europe—where German officials, who led the charge to oust Wolfowitz, fondly remember his role in helping to broker reunification during the first Bush administration. Moreover, despite a resumé that includes Enron and Goldman Sachs, Zoellick seems less in thrall to corporate interests than other



Laurie Rosenwald

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Republicans. He reportedly worked behind the scenes to persuade the first Bush administration to sign the 1992 U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. And, as U.S. trade representative (USTR) in 2001, he sought to ensure that intellectual property agreements did not hamper access to generic HIV drugs in the developing world. "It was very clear that pharma was trying to yank him back, and he was seen as selling out their interests," says Jeff Bader, who worked under Zoellick at the time.

As I spoke to Zoellick's peers and former colleagues, some went even further in their praise. "If you ask people to name great American strategic thinkers, they would offer names like Kissinger or Brzezinski," says Kurt Campbell of the Center for a New American Security. "Well, Zoellick is one of the great strategic operators working in the intersection of strategy and economics." Miraculously, Robert Zoellick seems to be just about the *only* person whose reputation has survived close contact with George W. Bush. You might say he sounds too good to be true.

In fact, Zoellick's past suggests he could fall prey to some of the same problems that doomed Wolfowitz. In 1999, after working at Fannie Mae and teaching for a year at the U.S. Naval Academy, Zoellick took over the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), vowing to revitalize what he saw as an organization losing its relevancy—the same task he's taking on at the Bank. By most accounts, his attempt to shake things up was a disaster. "From day one, he was in attack mode," says a former staffer. At one early meeting, Zoellick asked for the name of a regional contact, and, when only a junior employee knew the answer, he glared at the executive staff and erupted, "What the hell is wrong with all of you?" He not only incurred the wrath of his employees but also managed to alienate key donors. Hank Greenberg, then head of American International Group, was a major CSIS benefactor who prided himself on his knowledge of China. One story that made the rounds had Zoellick offending Greenberg by telling him that his views on China were facile—not exactly a wise move.

Within four months, Zoellick had run afoul of the think tank's board, and he left to serve as a foreign policy adviser to George W. Bush's campaign. A protégé of James Baker, he assisted his mentor during the Florida recount and then, after the election, was rewarded with the post of U.S. trade representative. Bader says his boss "mellowed" during his stint as USTR: "I think he'd learned from some of his previous management experience the risks in how his personality was perceived." But other former colleagues say Zoellick was still given to temper tantrums, and they recall that he periodically humiliated employees in public. He was known to hold grudges and could be remarkably thin-skinned. In 2005, the *Financial Times* reported on a testy exchange between Zoellick and EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson over subsidies for Airbus. According to the paper, the exchange involved Zoellick saying "you don't have to spin" and ultimately "slamming down the telephone." After the story appeared, Zoellick wrote a letter to the editor to dispute that he had hung up first—and to insist that he had never apologized to Mandelson, as the paper reported, "because I had no reason to do so." "I suggest in the future that the FT check its sources," he wrote snippily.

"Zoellick wasn't an organizations man," says a veteran of his tenure at CSIS. "He was good at saying, 'This is the way things should be,' and he's a smart guy. What he didn't get were interoffice dynamics, the way that people who are entrenched can dig their heels in." Yet that is exactly the skill Zoellick will need as he tries to steer the World Bank; and, by all accounts, that is precisely where Wolfowitz faltered.

But it isn't just Zoellick's personality that could create problems. There are questions about his politics, too. As USTR, he was unquestionably a brilliant negotiator and managed to keep international economic issues alive in an administration that had mostly lost interest after September 11. But not everyone is convinced that his time there bodes well for the World Bank. "I think his [appointment] is a dagger drawn at the developing countries," Jagdish Bhagwati, an economist at Columbia, told me. Bhagwati is hardly a man of the far left; he has written books defending free trade against anti-globalization activists. But he points out that Zoellick's tenure as USTR involved a much heavier focus on bilateral deals with developing countries than on broad multilateral trade agreements. The idea, Bhagwati says, was to allow the United States to negotiate with poorer countries one-on-one in order to force them to accept demands unrelated to trade. "He was using bilateral deals with Chile and Singapore to try to ram through restrictions on the use of capital controls," Bhagwati says. "I can't think of a single developmental economist who would say this is a good idea, and it suggests a cavalier interest in developing countries."

Moreover, Zoellick's Office of the USTR often put economic development at the service of the Bush administration's foreign policy. Before the invasion of Iraq, a trade official darkly hinted that the administration would have a "long memory" when it came to those who crossed it. That year, Zoellick scotched a trade deal with New Zealand, which had opposed the war—while fast-tracking a deal with Australia, which had backed it. He also reacted angrily when Egypt balked at supporting a U.S. challenge to Europe's ban on genetically modified foods, announcing that the country had jeopardized its hopes of a free-trade agreement. During a speech in May 2003, Zoellick said the United States would require "cooperation—or better—on foreign policy and security issues" from potential trading partners. While such a worldview may be defensible from the U.S. trade representative, it could encounter heavy resistance at the World Bank. One of the main complaints about Wolfowitz's anti-corruption campaign was that he conducted it in a haphazard and selective manner: It wasn't always clear why Chad was targeted but not Lebanon, or Uzbekistan but not Tajikistan, and many suspected that Wolfowitz was simply carrying out a neoconservative foreign policy by other means. "I think he sees the bank as another instrument to achieve what I see as long-held goals," one former Bank official told *The New Yorker*. Given his track record, Zoellick will have to prove quickly that he does not intend to take the same tack.

At the moment, of course, he is sending all the right signals. As USTR, Zoellick hired Chris Padilla, a former Kodak lobbyist, to do public outreach and put a more palatable face on the agency. Padilla, who now works in the Commerce Department, is quietly reaching out to European representatives to assuage their concerns over Zoellick's appointment. Moreover, at the beginning of this month, Zoellick embarked on a two-week listening tour in Africa, Europe, and Latin America—a sign that he is serious about mollifying those countries still seething over Wolfowitz's tenure. Yet former colleagues at the Office of the USTR note that Zoellick did something very similar in his first year there, making a show of extending an olive branch to labor and environmental groups only to disregard their concerns later. If that's what happens at the World Bank, President Bush won't be the only one scowling.

Bradford Plumer

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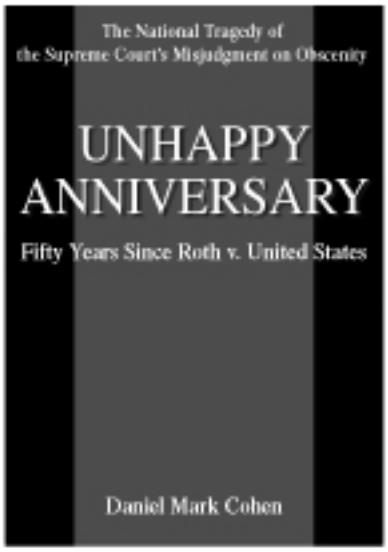
DEMOCRACY HYPOCRISY



In UNHAPPY ANNIVERSARY, *Daniel Mark Cohen hands down a devastating indictment of the United States Supreme Court for the immaculate failure of its obscenity jurisprudence and the consequent corruption of American children by Internet pornography.*

Cohen argues that contrary to the rule of American law, but as a matter of common sense, speech is properly defined in terms of words, and so pictures do not constitute a form of speech. Hence, pornography, while it may be shielded by other provisions of the Constitution, is not entitled to the supreme protection of the First Amendment.

At last, UNHAPPY ANNIVERSARY *constitutes an impassioned statement of advocacy for a forsaken constituency in this country: more than sixty million children who have been effectively abandoned by the United States Supreme Court and the American nation as a whole.*

> *We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, . . . appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions . . . with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, . . . pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.* – Declaration of Independence

IF THE PEOPLE of the United States collectively endorse a single prayer, one that, universal in its reach, transcends the necessary differences in faith and ethnicity that otherwise divide the nation, that prayer consists of three simple words:

GOD BLESS AMERICA.

BUT WHY should God bless America when her people, in ever increasing numbers, (now easily counted in the tens of millions), participate in an unacknowledged culture of prostitution, manifest most readily in their mass patronage of Internet and cable-television pornography? (For what is pornography, after all, but prostitution mediated by photographic cameras?)

AND WHY should God bless America when, as a consequence, she insists on the free, unregulated distribution via the Internet of the most vile sexual images so that, hourly, such pictures reach and indelibly corrupt the otherwise innocent eyes and chaste minds of the country's millions of unsupervised and latch-key children?

GOD BLESS AMERICA?

More than two thousand years ago, many centuries before English was spoken on earth, some unknown, now long-forgotten soul composed the following words, translated here from the original Hebrew:

Unless the Lord builds a house, they who build it labor in vain . . .

Many will recognize that proverb as the first line of psalm 127. However, is it possible that those words point to something more than the wisdom of acknowledging the limit of human industry? Perhaps Samuel Adams, Founding Father from Massachusetts, was seeking to convey something of the deeper truth contained in that proverb when in 1775, on the tenuous eve of the American Revolutionary War, he wrote:

"We may look to Armies for our Defense, but Virtue is our best security."

If Mr. Adams' words are true, then it explains why the billions of dollars our nation invested in the C.I.A., the F.B.I., and the Department of Defense were without force or effect in the months and days leading up to September 11, 2001. For, although many are acquainted with the first line of the psalm, few are familiar with the line that follows:

unless the Lord keeps a city, the watchman stays awake in vain . . .

UNHAPPY ANNIVERSARY

FIFTY YEARS SINCE ROTH V. UNITED STATES

The National Tragedy of the Supreme Court's Misjudgment on Obscenity

BY DANIEL MARK COHEN

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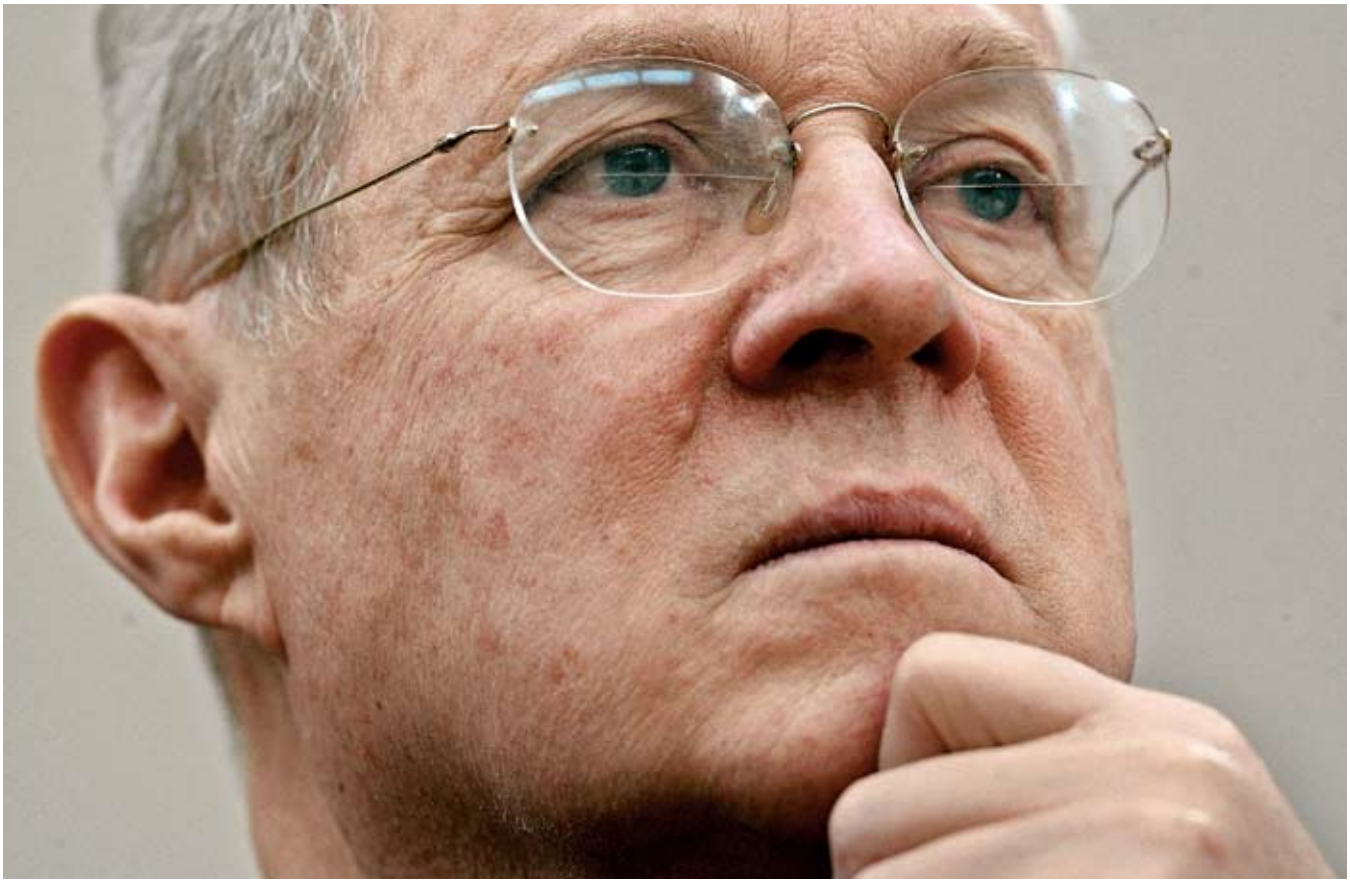
Supreme Leader

The arrogance of Justice Anthony Kennedy.

JEFFREY ROSEN



CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

On March 15, at the Kennedy Center in Washington, Justice Anthony Kennedy presided over the trial of Hamlet. "All rise!" commanded a bailiff in Elizabethan ruffles. "The Honorable the Eastern High Court for the Kingdom of Denmark is now in session!" As the sold-out house rose to its feet, Kennedy strode onto the bare stage in his black robes, taking a seat behind a judge's bench framed by an American flag and an enormous portrait of Shakespeare. "Please be seated," he said graciously.

For the next two hours, Kennedy watched benignly as the defense and prosecution conducted an entertaining debate about whether or not Hamlet was insane. When one of the defense witnesses insisted that Hamlet suffered from a bipolar disorder characterized by grandiosity and the "ambivalence that is one of the cardinal symptoms of psychosis," Kennedy smiled as if to acknowledge his own reputation for Hamlet-like indecision. He seemed irritated only when Abbe Lowell, who defended President Clinton in his impeachment trial and was now prosecuting Hamlet, explained the difference between fact and delusion by noting that "you may be deluded about who won the 2000 election, but that doesn't make it a fact." (Kennedy cast the tie-breaking vote to stop the Florida recount in *Bush* v. *Gore*.) Deliberating after the closing arguments, the jury eventually arrived at a verdict: six votes for sanity; six for insanity. And then, like an Elizabethan chorus waiting for its cue, Kennedy walked to the edge of the stage to lecture the audience about the moral of the evening. "The law and literature have this in common: We seek to impose order on a disordered reality; we seek to bring rationality to an existence that can be irrational and chaotic," Kennedy declared. "It seems to me that's what this day is about and what the law is about."

Anthony Kennedy seems most at home when he is lecturing others about morality. And now all of us have little choice but to pay attention. With the retirement of Sandra Day O'Connor, Kennedy is relishing his role as the new swing justice on an evenly divided court. As Kennedy goes, so goes America: As he votes to uphold partial-birth abortion laws or to strike down President Bush's military tribunals, lo shall they be upheld or struck down. Fawning lawyers must write briefs to Kennedy alone, and breathless commentators try to predict which laws he will bless or reprove.

Many accounts of Kennedy cast him as an indecisive justice—"Flipper," as the law clerks unkindly put it in a Supreme

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Court skit—who swings left or right in an anxious effort to court the approval of Washington elites: the Hamlet of the Supreme Court. But these accounts misunderstand Kennedy and his worldview. According to a recent study by Lee Epstein of Northwestern University and other political scientists, far from being unpredictable, Kennedy is one of the most consistent justices in recent history—displaying far less leftward ideological drift since the early '90s than O'Connor or even former Chief Justice William Rehnquist. From the beginning, Kennedy's performance on the Court has been defined not by indecision but by self-dramatizing utopianism. He believes it is the role of the Court in general and himself in particular to align the messy reality of American life with an inspiring and highly abstracted set of ideals. He thinks that great judges, like great literary figures, have both the power and the duty to "impose order on a disordered reality," as he told the Kennedy Center audience. By forcing legislators to respect a series of moralistic abstractions about liberty, equality, and dignity, judges, he believes, can create a national consensus about American values that will usher in what he calls "the golden age of peace." This lofty vision has made Kennedy the Court's most activist justice—that is, the justice who votes to strike down more state and federal laws combined than any of his colleagues.

Kennedy often complains about the "loneliness" of his position, which stems from the fact that he has no reliable public constituency: Both liberals and conservatives tend to view him as a self-aggrandizing turncoat. "Oh, I suppose everyone would like it if everyone applauded when he walked down the street," he said in an interview. "There is loneliness."

But, when it comes time to hand down decisions, Kennedy shows little ambivalence about the centrality of his role in our national drama. His opinions are full of Manichean platitudes about liberty and equality that acknowledge no uncertainty. "Liberty finds no refuge in a jurisprudence of doubt," he wrote in his decision in *Planned Parenthood* v. *Casey*, the 1992 opinion upholding the core of *Roe* v. *Wade*. "Preferment by race, when resorted to by the State, can be the most divisive of all policies, containing within it the potential to destroy confidence in the Constitution and in the idea of equality," he intoned in a 2003 dissent from the Court's decision to uphold affirmative action in law schools. Kennedy does indeed agonize before reaching his decisions, and he has dramatically switched his vote in high-profile cases. Yet he seems to agonize not because he is genuinely ambivalent or humble but because he thinks that agonizing is something a great judge should do, to show that he takes seriously the awesome magnitude of his task.

The grandiosity of Kennedy's self-image was on full display in a 2005 interview he gave to the Academy of Achievement, a group that seeks to inspire youth by promoting virtues like courage and integrity. In his interview, Kennedy made clear that he thinks the Court plays a more important role in American life than Congress. "You know, in any given year, we may make more important decisions than the legislative branch does—precluding foreign affairs, perhaps," he said. "Important in the sense that it will control the direction of society." When asked to name the most important qualities for achievement in his field, he replied: "To have an understanding that you have an opportunity to shape the destiny of the country." And that is exactly what Anthony Kennedy has set out to do.

To understand Kennedy's worldview, it may help to begin with his childhood in California. Kennedy's temperament seems to have been shaped by his experiences growing up in Sacramento in the 1930s and '40s. "It was a wonderful town and a wonderful time," Kennedy told the Academy of Achievement, with characteristic nostalgia. "What's the movie with Jimmy Stewart? *It's a Wonderful Life*." Born in 1936, Kennedy came of age during California's postwar economic boom. His father, a self-made lawyer and lobbyist, was a solo practitioner who would take Kennedy to his trials; his mother graduated from Stanford, taught in Sacramento, and later worked in the state Senate. From them and others, Kennedy imbibed a golden view of public service. "As I look back," he recalled, "many of my parents' closest friends were in the government of the State of California. … And they had this idea of public service, and, looking back now, I suppose that was a formative influence on me."

Reflecting on his childhood, Kennedy described himself as a "study nerd," a "skinny kid" with a "certain amount of insecurity" who was the "butt of many jokes." Although he succeeded at school, he felt isolated and alone. In fourth grade, his father rescued him from the indignities of interacting with his peers by persuading the state Senate to create a special after-school job for him as a page. Kennedy described that job as a life-changing experience, one that allowed him to meet idealistic role models, the most influential of whom was then-Governor Earl Warren. "I knew Earl Warren very well, on a somewhat professional basis," Kennedy recalled. "Professional, as in I was a nine-year-old page boy and he was the governor. We knew his children and played in the governor's mansion and so forth." Kennedy said he was proud to have a letter in which the future chief justice predicted, "You're going to go very far in government."

Kennedy admired Warren's moderation, later noting approvingly that he "ran on both the Democratic and Republican tickets." He embraced the governor's sunny belief in California as the embodiment of the American dream and politics as an opportunity for well-intentioned public servants to set aside their partisan differences and work for the common good. Indeed, Kennedy has often cast himself in Warren's image, treating the Court as an engine for moral change that could save politics from its most partisan tendencies. Like Warren, Kennedy frequently decides cases based on his instincts about fairness and justice, rather than rigorous legal analysis.

The difference is that Warren was a masterful politician who enjoyed interacting with people. Kennedy, by contrast, prefers romantic generalizations about "real people" to actually listening to them. He told the Academy of Achievement that he learned more about "real people" while working with his uncle on oil rigs in Canada and Louisiana than he did in the state Senate. But the only lessons he could recall were platitudes. "I think there's a lot of wisdom in the working man and the working woman," he said of his experience. "I think they're very concerned with what the country is like, what their life should be like."

Apparently uncomfortable with real conflicts among real people, Kennedy took refuge from an early age in the morality tales he found in fiction. "I think fiction is very important because it gets us into the mind of a person," he has argued. "*Hamlet* is a tremendous piece of literature. You know Hamlet better than you know most real people. Do you know the reason? Because you know what he's thinking. And this teaches you that every human has an integrity and an autonomy and a spirituality of his own, of her own, and great literature can teach you that." Note the lesson that Kennedy takes from *Hamlet*: not that Shakespeare expresses the unruliness and complexity of human beings by holding a mirror up to nature, nor that he resists all ideological systems and utopian abstractions, but that he reminds us simply that "every human" has integrity and spirituality.

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As a child, Kennedy also devoured Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which, he said, contains "one of the most brilliant scenes in literature," where the protagonist is tortured by his totalitarian interrogators into believing that two and two is five. "And this," he explained, "is a powerful reminder that governments want to plan your destiny. They want to plan what you think, and this must never happen." As a justice, Kennedy would seek to ensure that it never does happen—striking down what he viewed as dystopian laws that prevent Americans from enjoying the abstractions about liberty he cherished from his excursions into fiction.

Even today, Kennedy's world seems powerfully shaped by the ideas he has absorbed from novels and plays. Many of his most embarrassing moments have come from his habit of dramatically comparing himself to archetypes from literature. Before handing down his decision in *Planned Parenthood* v. *Casey*, he told a reporter whom he had invited into his chambers, "Sometimes you don't know if you're Caesar about to cross the Rubicon or Captain Queeg cutting your own tow line." He then excused himself, saying that he needed to "brood."

On the Court, Kennedy has tended to construct morality plays in which he occupies the central role. Unlike Warren, who knew his mind and then attempted to persuade colleagues, Kennedy prefers that colleagues approach him on bended knee and try to persuade him. Alternatively, he likes to agonize in private, then swoop down to announce that he has unexpectedly changed his views. Consider *Lee* v. *Weisman*, the 1992 case holding that public schools could not allow a rabbi to lead a graduation prayer. During oral arguments, when the solicitor general suggested that Deborah Weisman, the student in question, could skip her graduation if the prayer made her feel uncomfortable, Kennedy, according to Linda Greenhouse's account in *The New York Times*, "looked deeply troubled" and immediately retorted: "[In] our culture, a graduation is a key event in a young person's life"—language that he would insert into his majority opinion. But, according to Justice Blackmun's papers, Kennedy originally voted to uphold the graduation prayer and changed his vote only after drafting an opinion to that effect and dramatically announcing to Blackmun that "the draft looked quite wrong." Kennedy worried that the prayer would cause "embarrassment" and "a sense of isolation and affront" for Deborah—feelings he himself experienced in school. Just as Kennedy's father rescued him by allowing him to take refuge in the state Senate, so Kennedy hoped to rescue Deborah from the psychological isolation caused by a coercive state.

His performance in *Bush* v. *Gore* was similarly melodramatic. Kennedy initially joined the four liberals who wanted to allow the Florida recount to continue, but, after a brief show of agonizing, he changed his mind. This left Justices Breyer and Souter—who thought they could win Kennedy's vote—with their hands extended, played for dupes. In the per curiam opinion itself, which Kennedy drafted on his own, his muddy writing style and self-aggrandizing conception of the Court's role are on full display. "When contending parties invoke the process of the courts," he wrote pompously, "it becomes our unsought responsibility to resolve the federal and constitutional issues the judicial system has been forced to confront." Note the false modesty and the feint at shrinking from the burden of an "unsought responsibility." Of course, it was the Court, at Kennedy's insistence, that decided to settle a debate Congress would have resolved.

As a child, Kennedy hung around California Governor Earl Warren and his family (above).

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Kennedy's affinity for the broad generalizations of literature rather than the messiness of real life is perhaps most clear in his abortion decisions. "You know, in literature, the woman is a symbol of mercy and of equity: Antigone, Portia—Rosa Parks, to use a real person," he told the Academy of Achievement. "That's why Justice is a woman, even though she has a sword sometimes." In his abortion opinions, Kennedy often treats women as symbols rather than actual people. Consider *Gonzales* v. *Carhart*, his five-four opinion in April upholding the federal ban on partial-birth abortions. There was nothing inherently objectionable about Kennedy's tie-breaking vote to uphold the ban—an uncharacteristic example of deference to Congress from the justice who has voted to strike down more acts of Congress than any of his colleagues except for Justices Scalia and Thomas. But Kennedy couldn't resist adorning his opinion with an unnecessary soliloquy about how the ban would serve the noble goal of protecting women from emotional distress. "Respect for human

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life finds an ultimate expression in the bond of love the mother has for her child," he wrote portentously. "While we find no reliable data to measure the phenomenon, it seems unexceptionable to conclude some women come to regret their choice to abort the infant life they once created and sustained."

The only support Kennedy offered for this ode to women's emotional vulnerability was a brief filed by "180 post-abortive women" who said they "suffered the adverse emotional and psychological effects of abortion." Claims about an "abortion trauma syndrome" first surfaced in 1981 and were taken up by the pro-life movement as a strategic way of dissuading ambivalent women from having abortions later in pregnancy. As Justice Ginsburg noted in her blistering dissent, there is no convincing evidence that an abortion trauma syndrome exists; on the contrary, the weight of scientific evidence suggests it doesn't. But Kennedy simply didn't care that he could find no "reliable data to measure the phenomenon." For him, "It is self-evident that a mother who comes to regret her choice to abort must struggle with grief more anguished and sorrow more profound when she learns, only after the event, what she once did not know: that she allowed a doctor to pierce the skull and vacuum the fast-developing brain of her unborn child … ."

Why is Kennedy so confident that this is "self-evident"? As Ginsburg suggested, a woman who is determined to have an abortion might suffer more profound anguish at enduring a procedure that her doctor considers less safe, or she might suffer just as much anguish if she ends her pregnancy with another, more common abortion procedure—one that Kennedy insists is her constitutional right. The truth is that Kennedy isn't interested in examining the actual experiences of real women affected by the partial-birth abortion ban; he feels he has an intuitive understanding of what women are feeling and is convinced that he has a unique and solemn responsibility to define the essential nature of women's dignity.

Indeed, in his *Casey* decision, Kennedy included similarly irrelevant generalizations about the nature of women's love for their children. "The mother who carries a child to full term is subject to anxieties, to physical constraints, to pain that only she must bear," he wrote sentimentally. "That these sacrifices have from the beginning of the human race been endured by woman with a pride that ennobles her in the eyes of others and gives to the infant a bond of love cannot alone be grounds for the State to insist she make the sacrifice." Kennedy went on to include a paean to the "heart of liberty," which he said must include "the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life"—a phrase Scalia archly ridiculed as the "sweet-mystery-of-life passage." Undaunted, in the partial-birth case, Kennedy included a sweet-mystery-of-*fetal*-life passage: "The government may use its voice and its regulatory authority to show its profound respect for the life within the woman."

Never mind that the two sweet mysteries clash with each other. In Kennedy's mind, the messy realities behind real laws must yield to his idealizing moral abstractions. "The State's interest in respect for life is advanced by the dialogue that better informs the political and legal systems, the medical profession, expectant mothers, and society as a whole of the consequences that follow from a decision to elect a late-term abortion," he concluded. Kennedy isn't fazed by the fact that the partial-birth law, by his own concession, will prevent almost no actual women from having actual abortions: The "dialogue" he has in mind, like all of his dialogues, is one where the Court asks Americans to agonize about moral principles handed down from on high, and they solemnly accept the invitation. In Kennedy's mind, the Court defines America's moral principles, not the other way around. As he put it in *Casey*, the American people's "belief in themselves" as a law-abiding people "is not readily separable from their understanding of the Court invested with the authority to … speak before all others for their constitutional ideas." This is a more pretentious version of the Lord Chancellor's motto in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*: "The law is the true embodiment of everything that's excellent/It has no kind of fault or flaw/And I, my Lords, embody the law."

In other words, Anthony Kennedy doesn't much care whether his abstractions are true; the important thing for him is that he *wants* them to be true. As a lawyer in private practice, the future Justice Louis Brandeis was famous for having inaugurated the "Brandeis Brief," a long compendium of statistics measuring the empirical effects of various pieces of social legislation on real American workers. Kennedy, by contrast, has inspired the proliferation of the anti-Brandeis Brief, which might be called the Kennedy Brief. In a Kennedy Brief, lawyers on both sides fall over themselves to court Kennedy's favor by repeatedly citing the opinions of Justice Kennedy. These briefs are now so common that they've become an inside joke within the Supreme Court bar. In the partial-birth abortion case, the Bush administration's brief cited Kennedy's emotional dissent in the 2003 partial-birth case 22 times, and one pro-choice activist told *The Washington Post*, "If you look at all the briefs, they are all written to Justice Kennedy."

Once he receives a Kennedy Brief, Kennedy—unlike Brandeis—feels no need to make an independent empirical evaluation of the effects of the law that is being challenged. Instead, by his own account, he makes an emotional judgment about the law and then tries to formulate his intuition into a "verbal formula"—that is, a utopian abstraction against which the law can be measured. "You know, all of us have an instinctive judgment that we make," he told the Academy of Achievement. "You meet a person, you say, 'I trust this person. I don't trust this person.' … And judges do the same thing. … But, after you make a judgment, you then must formulate the reason for your judgment into a verbal phrase, into a verbal formula. And then you have to see if that makes sense, if it's logical, if it's fair, if it accords with the law, if it accords with the Constitution, if it accords with your own sense of ethics and morality."

This is the *Blink* theory of jurisprudence: Kennedy makes a spot judgment about how the world should be, then expresses it as an ideal against which the world must be measured. The problem with Kennedy's snap judgments and sonorous aphorisms is that they often have little to do with reality. Take his cavalier treatment of scientific evidence in *Roper* v. *Simmons*, the 2005 case that struck down the juvenile death penalty. In a characteristic conflation of intuition and pseudoscience, Kennedy declared: "As any parent knows and as the scientific and sociological studies respondent and his *amici* cite tend to confirm, '[a] lack of maturity and an underdeveloped sense of responsibility are found in youth more often than in adults and are more understandable among the young.'" In fact, what "any parent knows" has little to do with the neuroscience presented in some of the briefs. As Stephen Morse of the University of Pennsylvania has noted, if the immaturity of adolescent brains were responsible for juvenile homicides, then the homicide rates of 16- and 17-year-olds should be the same across the world. In fact, the homicide rates of American youths are very different than those from Danish and Finnish youths—suggesting something other than neuroscience is at work.

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Kennedy went on to detect a national consensus against the juvenile death penalty in the fact that 18 states—or 47 percent of those that allow capital punishment—now prohibit the execution of underage offenders, and the fact that four of these states' legislatures had adopted their bans since the Court last considered the question in 1989. As Scalia pointed out in a convincing dissent, "Words have no meaning if the views of less than 50 percent of death penalty States can constitute a national consensus." But Kennedy was more interested in his own abstractions about national consensus than in whether one actually existed. Democracy, he has repeatedly argued, can't exist without consensus. As he told the Academy of Achievement, "The whole idea of a democratic society is that there must be a consensus, and it's a consensus that should be based on rational dialogue." And, when consensus proves elusive, Kennedy believes the Court can will one into existence.

Kennedy's search for moral consensus is not limited to the United States. He has infuriated conservatives by citing evidence of purported international consensus in his opinions, provoking some Republicans to call for his impeachment. Kennedy's use of international law differs from that of justices like Stephen Breyer, who views the opinions of international courts as a useful source of empirical data. "We're not the only court in the world. See what they have to say," Breyer told a former clerk, according to Emily Bazelon. Kennedy, in a far less modest spirit, strikes down U.S. laws as incompatible with his own generalizations about national consensus, then tries to shore up a weak case by insisting that the international community is of the same mind. In *Roper* v. *Simmons*, the juvenile death penalty case, and *Lawrence* v. *Texas*, the sodomy case, he cited international opinions as evidence of an international consensus about the death penalty and privacy, even though the differences in the way democracies around the world view both questions are far more telling than the similarities.

In addition to trying to impose an international consensus on the United States, Kennedy wants to export American ideals to a grateful world. Asked to identify his greatest concern for the twenty-first century, he replied: "My major concern is that what I thought was the golden age of peace seems farther from our reach than I would have thought ten years ago." He went on to claim credit for having identified the clash of civilizations between America and Islam in 1999 as one of the great challenges of the new millennium. "I got more letters from that comment—it was on C-SPAN—than anything I've ever said," he recalled. Kennedy also insisted that Americans have a duty to "build bridges of understanding to explain the principles of freedom … to the rest of the world because we have a bond with all of humankind." Testifying in the same spirit earlier this year before Congress, he boasted that he had just met the chief justice of Nepal, who had recently survived a Maoist coup attempt. "I said, 'What can we do for you?'" Kennedy recalled. "And he said, 'Justice, … just keep what you're doing. You're an example for the rest of the world.'"

Is there a case to be made for Kennedy's jurisprudence? The most convincing defense is made by some Supreme Court advocates who say he is willing to listen to the arguments in important cases, engage with them seriously, and make a decision based on his sense of what justice and the law require, rather than a partisan ideological agenda. "As a litigant coming into the court, the thing you want most of all is a justice who has his or her mind open to argument, persuasion, and reason," says my brother-in-law Neal Katyal, who successfully argued the *Hamdan* case last June, where Kennedy sided with a five-four majority that struck down Bush's military commissions. "You want someone who struggles really hard, who's kept awake at night, grappling with what to do—a true judge. Justice Kennedy, regardless of the issue in front of him, has always been that kind of justice."

The claim that Kennedy is open-minded is called into question, however, by Lee Epstein's study, which concluded that, in all doctrinal areas—especially affirmative action—Kennedy has not changed much since 1990. Of course, even if Kennedy isn't open-minded, he might still be praised if he were so ambivalent about judicial power that he deferred to the other branches, although he disagreed with their actions. But agonizing can be a sign of many things—modesty, arrogance, or insecurity. Truly modest judges agonize because they are humble about their own limitations and genuinely ambivalent about second-guessing legislatures. Judged by his willingness to strike down federal and state laws, Kennedy is the least modest justice on the Court.

That still leaves the core of a case for Kennedy, which is that he is a moderate, decent, fair-minded person rather than a judicial ideologue—no small achievement in a polarized age. And there's no question that Kennedy deserves praise for deciding many important cases on the basis of what he thinks justice requires, rather than consistently voting in ways that happen to coincide with the platform of the Republican Party. But the same could have been said for Kennedy's predecessor as the median justice, Sandra Day O'Connor. And, in other respects, the contrast between Kennedy and O'Connor is stark. To be sure, no one would accuse O'Connor of being modest. She viewed her role on the Court much as she viewed her role in the Arizona legislature: to split the difference between Republicans and Democrats in order to express the view of the

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American median voter. But O'Connor's decisions, as Cass R. Sunstein has noted, were minimalist—that is, they were narrow and shallow. Because she offered few principles to support her rulings, it was difficult to extend them to future cases. Moreover, her thinly reasoned opinions were easier for citizens with differing political commitments to accept.

By contrast, Kennedy instinctively prefers opinions that are broad and deep. He attempts to identify a sweeping principle of justice and then tries to impose his abstractions on society. Unlike a consistently principled judge, however, Kennedy often balks at carrying his principles to their logical conclusions. In striking down sodomy laws in *Lawrence* v. *Texas*, he promised that his reasoning wouldn't lead to gay marriage. But he also unnecessarily included his lucubrations about the sweet mystery of life—then was presumably shocked, shocked, when the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, a few months later, invoked the sweet-mystery-of-life passage to strike down restrictions on gay marriage. And, in *Bush* v. *Gore*, he denied the obvious consequences of his newly created right to equal treatment for ballots, which was to call into question the results in virtually any close election. Kennedy is not a systematic thinker but a utopian moralist; and, like many sweeping visionaries, he is unwilling to accept the radical implications of his own abstractions.

Not surprisingly, these abstractions have a way of infuriating the large number of citizens who aren't inclined to conform to them. Later this term, Kennedy is likely to provide the fifth vote to strike down restrictions on campaign finance as well as race-conscious methods of assigning students to public schools. If he writes the opinion in the schools case, it will no doubt include warnings about how race-consciousness of any kind threatens to balkanize society. Kennedy has almost never met an affirmative action program he is willing to support. In his dissent from O'Connor's decision upholding affirmative action in higher education in 2003, he wrote that affirmative action might have the perverse effect of "perpetuat[ing] the hostilities [it is] designed to avoid" and he insisted that "our constitutional tradition has always sought … harmony and mutual respect among all citizens." Kennedy's sunny vision of color-blind harmony may have come from the racially peaceful memories of his Sacramento upbringing, where the best man at his parents' wedding was Roger Traynor, the California Supreme Court justice who struck down anti-miscegenation laws in 1948. But a broad and simplistic paean to color-blindness in the current racial assignment cases would be especially unfortunate: Two thoughtful Republican appellate court judges, Michael Boudin and Alex Kozinski, have already upheld the programs on the grounds that they are less balkanizing and stigmatic than affirmative action in law schools. For Kennedy to sweep away these important distinctions with his usual platitudes about consensus and harmony would be an appalling effort to cut short one of our most divisive national debates.

Left: President Reagan nominated Kennedy to the Court in 1987. Right: Kennedy trades swing-justice secrets with Sandra Day O'Connor.

MARK SILSON/GETTY IMAGES

It isn't just in the legal realm that Kennedy enjoys the sound of his own voice. Five years ago, as Laura Bush looked on with a bewildered smile, Kennedy moderated a discussion about American values after September 11 at a public high school in Washington, D.C. Sporting a natty gray suit and a pocket handkerchief, Kennedy asked the students which books and movies they would choose to educate the citizens of an imaginary nation called Quest about American values. As the students struggled to get a word in edgewise during the discussion, which was broadcast on C-SPAN, Kennedy kept answering his own questions and returning to his favorite themes. When one student timidly suggested a Dr. Seuss book called *The Sneetches* that "talks about racial acceptance," Kennedy gravely replied that "Dr. Seuss actually wrote in two different periods, kind of like Picasso. The first period was *One Fish Two Fish Red-fish Bluefish*, but then he wrote about ethical themes, and it's very important for young people to have ethical themes, like *Yertle the Turtle*." This launched him into an extended riff about how the men and women of Quest, represented by two characters called M and W, should be asked to read *Hamlet*.

He then changed the subject: "Movies, I want to hear about the movies. You want to leave W with a movie that says this is a free people, this is a good people." A girl named Dominique volunteered *American History X*, the 1998 crime drama staring Edward Norton. "It's somewhat of a sketchy movie, but it deals with the concept that people can change," she said accurately. "The main character in the movie is a neo-Nazi and he changes his mind about who is the superior race." Kennedy didn't like this answer and immediately tried to change the subject. "For later on, I want to ask, true or false: Shakespeare shows what a free people can produce?" he replied impatiently.

After more soliloquies—about Orwell and Kubrick—Kennedy worried that he had been too high-handed with the citizens of Quest by reducing the men and women of his imaginary country to the abstractions M and W. "Was it wrong to give them no name?" he fussed. But, quickly, he reassured himself that his abstractions had served a purpose. "It shows that there are people not in our

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consciousness, there in the throes of desperation," he said. "We don't think of M who's working for his family, we think in terms of massive governmental policy, not individuals who are striving to find enrichment and meaning. M and W don't have a name," he continued, "because you don't care about them." He looked intensely at the students. "Notice where M is. He's at the bottom of the pit. If you read Plato, M can't see the truth in the pit. You've got to go down and reach him." Kennedy closed with his favorite exhortation: "Remember that all of you are the advocates for freedom, but, as I've indicated, in order to transmit it you have to know its purposes. … Lawyers like to leave juries with little slogans, and if they were teaching this class, they'd say: 'Remember, yours is the heritage of freedom. Learn it or lose it.'"

By the end of the discussion, two of Kennedy's favorite themes appeared to be in tension with each other. On one hand, Kennedy was warning the students not to condescend to M with massive government bureaucracies; at the same time, he was exhorting them to educate M, who is, apparently, too dull-witted to see beyond his pit. But, if any of the students noticed this conflict, they didn't dare point it out. Kennedy, after all, showed little interest in actual discussion with his audience. "Debate is essential for democracy to make it work," he told the students. "But, if you have a culture and a dialogue in which there's nothing but debate all the time, then it seems hostile or fractious." Coming from a man who claims to worship democracy but, in fact, wants to short-circuit all our most important national debates through his jurisprudence—and then wishes his fellow citizens would applaud when he walks down the street—this sentiment is hardly surprising. In Kennedy's interaction with students, as in his opinions, it is obvious that he has little interest in the views of real people in a real democracy. He is more interested in lecturing than listening, in judging people against his own moral abstractions than seeking to learn from conflicting views. "There's a time for debate and a time for consensus," he instructed the students, invoking one of his favorite themes. "There's a time for the adversary process and a time for personal support." By which he apparently means support for the wisdom of Justice Anthony Kennedy. ◆

STEPHEN DUPONT/CONTACT PRESS IMAGES

Afghan Spring

A journey among suicide bombers, feminist governors, and acres and acres of poppies.

PETER BERGEN

This January, somewhere in Logar Province, 40 miles south of Kabul, a 20-year-old goat herder named Imdadullah strapped on a bulky black waistcoat lined with packages of TNT. The packages were wrapped with newspaper printed in Urdu—the lingua franca of Pakistan—and tied together with a cord that led to a switch attached to a battery capable of detonating the explosives. Glued to the newspapers were nails and ball bearings.

Imdadullah was in Afghanistan at the time, but he is originally from a Pakistani town called Bannu in the North West Frontier Province, where he had trained for his mission. In that sense, he was typical of suicide bombers in Afghanistan, most of whom, according to a senior U.S. military intelligence official, are Pashtuns from Pakistan. He had been given his explosives-laden vest by a Pakistani Taliban commander named Akthar Mohammed, but, unlike some suicide bombers, he was not given tranquilizers before setting off on his assignment: to blow up a convoy of Western soldiers and thereby earn his ticket to paradise.

But, as Imdadullah approached the convoy, fiddling with his detonator switch, he was spotted by an eagle-eyed Afghan policeman. Whether because of faulty wiring or because he simply lost his nerve, Imdadullah's bomb never went off, and, instead of paradise, he ended up in jail. Three months later, he sat across from me in an interrogation room at a dingy Kabul prison, wrapped in a dark cloak to ward off the building's chill. A cataract had occluded one of his eyes, turning it from brown to a milky color. He told me he was not being mistreated by Afghanistan's National Security Directorate—which had arranged the interview—and was speaking of his own free will.

It's not often that you get to chat with a failed suicide bomber, which is per-

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haps as good a definition of failure as any other, and I was curious to find out what Imdadullah had hoped to achieve. "I regret that Almighty Allah did not allow me to sacrifice myself. I wanted to attack the British and foreigners and Americans," he told me, expressing confidence that "Almighty God would have given me paradise" and that, as a martyr, he would have been granted 72 virgins. This didn't seem quite the moment to point out that there is a lively, ongoing debate among scholars of Islam as to whether the 72 promised virgins might, in fact, only be 72 raisins. Instead, I pressed him on the question of who, exactly, he was hoping to kill. "By your standards, I'm an infidel," I said. "Do you want to kill me?" Smiling slightly, he replied, "Why should I kill you? I kill those who bother Muslims."

Of course, had Imdadullah's bomb gone off, he almost certainly would have killed many more Muslims than those who supposedly bother them. According to a Human Rights Watch report released in April, eight of every ten victims of suicide attacks in Afghanistan last year were civilians. In September, I saw how this plays out at the scene of a bombing a few hundred yards from the American Embassy in Kabul. A suicide bomber in a car—what the U.S. military portentously refers to as a VBIED, a vehicle borne improvised explosive device—had veered into a U.S. convoy, killing two soldiers. But also killed in the blast were at least a dozen Afghan bystanders. Body parts were scattered blocks from the scene of the attack.

There have been dozens of similar suicide attacks in Afghanistan this year, and there will likely be more. A U.S. military official in Afghanistan told me that some suicide bombers' families are paid as much as $500, a good sum of money in a part of the world where many laborers only make a couple of dollars per day. Meanwhile, in Pakistan, the imam of the Red Mosque—located in the heart of Islamabad, just a five-minute drive from Pakistan's parliament—says that, in recent years, hundreds of worshippers have inquired as to whether suicide operations are allowed. His answer is yes—as long as they are directed against occupying forces in Iraq or Afghanistan.

As for Imdadullah, at the end of our interview, I asked him whether he still hoped to be a martyr once he got out of jail. "Of course," he replied, in a tone that suggested I had just asked a stupid question.

I WENT TO Afghanistan in April because Taliban commanders had spent the winter promising a massive spring offensive against NATO forces—the threat that jihadis like Imdadullah, and presumably more lethal, would fan out across the country to wreak havoc. It would, I assumed, be a pivotal month for the country, and therefore a good time to assess just how well the Western project to remake Afghanistan was faring.

I first visited Afghanistan in the summer of 1993 during the middle of a nasty civil war. The decrepit Russian transport plane on which I was traveling blew out a tire as it landed in Kabul, and the airfield was scattered with the carcasses of planes that had either crashed or been shot down. Kabul was then being torn apart by a bewildering variety of Afghan militias, which often employed child soldiers and were killing tens of thousands of civilians every year. The prime minister, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, was perhaps the only leader in world history to shell his own capital on a daily basis. Every evening, I'd watch the shells arc over the city as the sun went down—quite a beautiful sight if you weren't on the receiving end.

My arrival in Kabul this April—on Ariana, the Afghan national airline—was, by comparison, uneventful. To be sure, Ariana won't be winning *Condé Nast Traveller* awards any time soon. On a recent flight, in a charmingly retro gesture, members of the cabin staff were smoking. Ariana is also reported to be broke, and the in-flight magazine contained a blistering screed from the airline's director aimed at the previous director and his supposedly idiotic business practices. Still, the plane was packed with Afghan workers based in Dubai, and minesweepers are no longer needed on the Kabul airfield. Small signs of progress, perhaps, but progress nonetheless.

Every war has its hotel. For the civil war in Beirut during the 1980s, it is the Commodore. For the Iraq war, it is the Hamra with its swimming pool. For the war in Afghanistan, it is the Gandamack. (Gandamack is a village in eastern Afghanistan where British soldiers were massacred during the disastrous First Afghan War of 1842.) The Gandamack is owned by an old friend of mine, the British combat cameraman Peter Jouvenal. A collection of antique rifles for sale lines the entrance hall, and an English breakfast (with real bacon!) is always available. Tea is served on the veranda overlooking a garden tended by a hunched Afghan gardener, while flak jackets and helmets for rent are strewn on an upper floor. During my stay, Jouvenal organized a celebration of the Queen's birthday that involved roasting a sheep on a spit; earlier in the day, the sheep had been contentedly nibbling grass on the lawn. Dozens of guests ate dinner at a long table decorated with British flags and ceremonial sabers.

A journalist who lived at the Gandamack for nine months captured its vibe well when she described it as *Full Metal Jacket* meets "Fawlty Towers." Most nights at the Hare and Hound—the Gandamack bar that wouldn't look out of place in Sussex—you can meet aid workers speaking English with Nordic accents; security contractors with bulging biceps; film directors making their next big movie in Afghanistan; cameramen fresh from Iraq; and a fair number of people who aren't too explicit about what they are doing—but it must be really important, as they have to be quite mysterioso about it. One night, I met a representative of the p.r. firm Hill & Knowlton, which advises senior officials at the powerful Ministry of the Interior. He said he had spent a grand total of ten days in Afghanistan. Previously he had been working on "democracy promotion" in Egypt (akin, perhaps, to promoting trickle-down economics to the Khmer Rouge). One major success of the war on terrorism: It has been a full employment program for all manner of Beltway consultants.

OUTSIDE THE confines of the Gandamack, all is not well. The day I arrived in Kabul, a suicide bomber detonated his bomb near the Afghan parliament, killing himself and two bystanders. It was the third suicide attack in Kabul in as many weeks. In 2006, suicide attacks in Afghanistan quintupled to 139; IED attacks doubled; attacks on international forces tripled; 700 Afghan civilians died at the hands of the insurgents; U.S. and NATO military deaths were at their highest levels since the Taliban was ousted; and Western forces continued to mistakenly kill local civilians. In late April, for instance, some 50 civilians, including women and children, died during a U.S. Special Forces operation in the western province of Herat, a case that enraged the usually mild-mannered Afghan president, Hamid Karzai. That same month, the Taliban beheaded Afghan journalist Ajmal Naqshbandi, while the country's attorney general ordered his goons to detain reporters at a leading private TV network because he claimed he was quoted out of context. The most important road in the country, which links Kabul to Kandahar, is now a suicidal drive for any foreigner without an escort of well-armed security guards.

All of which is quite apart from the other, more mundane, problems that

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bedevil the country—such as electricity only being available in Kabul for four to six hours a day, if you are one of the lucky few with access to electricity at all. Kabul is also reputed to have the highest rate of airborne fecal material in the world. The place is literally running with shit.

A visit to the home of one of Kabul's ubiquitous street kids underlines the grinding poverty that is the lot of the vast majority of Afghans. Muzhgan, a slight, shy eleven-year-old girl, begs on the street and collects scraps of paper and cardboard for cooking fuel, while her 14-year-old sister, Hamida, works in a textile factory. Their father, Abdullah, is a day laborer who is unemployed throughout the long winter months when building construction stops. Luckily, Muzhgan attends the Aschiana school, which provides her with a hot lunch and some schooling—as it does for about 6,000 other youngsters in the Kabul area who would otherwise go hungry and uneducated. Together with her sister, Muzhgan brings in ten dollars a week, which is barely enough to cover the rent on the one-room home they share with six other family members in a burgeoning Kabul slum. Theirs is the lot of millions of Kabul residents.

And yet, strangely, despite all the problems facing their country, Afghans remain decisively upbeat about both their government and the presence of international forces. According to a countrywide poll conducted by ABC News and the BBC late last year, President Karzai enjoys an approval rating of 68 percent, while 88 percent say they are happy the United States invaded, 74 percent hold a favorable opinion of America, and 80 percent say they want foreign troops to remain.

No group has more reason for optimism than the Hazaras, an ethnic minority whose distinctive Asiatic features and Shiism set them apart from the predominantly Sunni Pashtun and Tajik populations. Fleeing government-led pogroms in the late nineteenth century, they moved deep into the impenetrable mountains of central northern Afghanistan, known as the Hazarajat.

To get there, I took a U.N. helicopter over mountains more than 10,000 feet high, their passes clogged with snow. Eventually, we descended into a valley where sandstone cliffs rimmed green fields and a lively market town. This was the region's capital, Bamiyan—best known to Westerners as the former home of the enormous stone Buddhas that the Taliban reduced to fragments in March 2001. Those fragments are now stored in rudimentary shelters near the twin niches that once housed the giant statues. A decision is still pending as to how—or whether—the Buddhas can be put back together.

Security in Bamiyan is handled by a small contingent of soldiers from New Zealand who drive around town in SUVs, a striking contrast to the armored Humvees that American soldiers must take on excursions out of their forward operating bases in the eastern reaches of the country. Kids wave at the Kiwis as they drive by, while merchants, who fled to the mountains when the Taliban were running the show, now do a brisk business.

Presiding over this Afghan success story is Habiba Sarabi—the country's only female governor, and my guide to Bamiyan. Under an intense sun, I watched her officiate at a graduation ceremony for police cadets, which, quite unusually, included ten women in headscarves and neatly pressed blue uniforms. Performing a vaguely Eastern European goose step, the cadets marched smartly up to the podium to be inducted into the Afghan National Police.

Sarabi is an irrepressible woman, smiling constantly from behind a pair of glasses and a veil draped over a dark jacket, which she wore with a matching skirt. A pharmacist by training, she speaks with the English she learned while working for an NGO in Pakistan, where she fled the Taliban with her three children. From there, she helped organize underground schools in Kabul and other Afghan cities that continued to operate under the Taliban. Following the U.S. invasion, she was named minister for women's affairs. Sarabi says the biggest achievement of her tenure was to help enshrine equal rights for women in the constitution and secure a quarter of the seats in parliament for females. She adds that around 40 percent of girls in Afghanistan are now in school.

Sarabi's Hazara minority has also seen dramatic changes in the past several years. She terms it a "golden age" for her people, citing the low level of violence in her province and the numerous government projects that are underway there. "Sometimes," she tells me as she jumps into an SUV guarded by a single armed officer, "I think I am a very good target for Taliban."

Bamiyan is not the only place in Afghanistan where you can feel some optimism about the future. A trip to Faryab Province on Afghanistan's northern border with Turkmenistan shows how, hundreds of miles from the restive Pashtun regions to the south and east, Afghan life has achieved a measure of normality. I traveled there with

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Clockwise from top left: A 2001 battle near Mazar-e-Sharif; a portrait of Ahmad Shah Massoud in Kabul; the Gandamack's exterior; dining at the Gandamack; a northern Afghanistan refugee camp, 2001; Taliban fighters, 2007; a refugee and his daughter, 2001; a poppy farmer; one of the two Bamiyan Buddhas.

General Mohammed Daud, deputy minister of the interior and an affable protégé of legendary Afghan commander Ahmad Shad Massoud. Daud runs his country's poppy eradication efforts, an enormously sensitive issue for Afghans. After all, poppy is, in many regions, the backbone of the local economy, employing around two million people and generating at least a third of Afghanistan's GDP. Nationwide, poppy cultivation grew by more than 50 percent last year.

In Maymana, the provincial capital of Faryab, I watched as Daud—a dapper dresser in an off-white safari jacket and slacks into which he had tucked a pistol—addressed an outdoor *jirga* of 300 tribal leaders, resplendent in their gray and white turbans and surrounded by fluttering black, green, and red Afghan flags. Daud explained to them that the government was considering sending its forces to Faryab to help with eradication. Daud was followed by Doug Wankel, the American Embassy's point person on drugs in Afghanistan. Wankel echoed the oft-quoted words of President Karzai: "Either Afghanistan destroys poppy, or drugs will destroy Afghanistan." The speeches were met with applause.

This contrasts strongly with the riots and deaths that have followed eradication efforts in other parts of the country. In the south, poppy eradication is a particularly hard sell. Together with Daud, I traveled to Uruzgan, an isolated, poverty-stricken province that retains a strong Taliban presence. Tarin Kot, the dusty provincial capital, is a one-horse town largely devoid of women. Its central market is peopled by Pashtun tribesmen wearing the black turbans favored by the Taliban. Before he became president, Karzai narrowly escaped being killed in Tarin Kot when he was surrounded by Taliban fighters. Over the past couple of months, things had been relatively quiet in Tarin Kot because poppy-harvesting season meant that everyone was busy working the fields.

Daud met with Uruzgan's deputy governor and a couple of Dutch army officers who run the local provincial reconstruction team to discuss how and where eradication efforts might proceed. During a break in the meeting, I stepped onto a balcony in the governor's mansion and was greeted by an astonishing sight: a sea of lush poppy fields stretching from the walls of the mansion to a row of mountains several miles away. Streams that were swollen by the heavy winter snowfall, ending years of drought, will no doubt produce another bumper crop here; and, already, the distinctive red flowers of mature poppy plants could be seen in some of the fields. An Afghan counternarcotics official joined me on the balcony. "Uruzgan is a very beautiful place," he said. Smiling, he added, "And a very dangerous place."

The next morning, we drove to a desert flatland area several miles outside town. There, we met up with what looked like a traveling circus, albeit a heavily armed one. Two hundred policemen trucked in from Kabul had set up large green tents to house themselves during the two-week eradication program that was planned for the province. The policemen were members of the Afghan Eradication Force, which travels around the country destroying poppy fields the locals don't have the will or ability to get rid of on their own.

Large trucks disgorged some 20 ATVs—powerful, four-wheel-drive mini-tractors with sizeable tires. To the backs of the vehicles, workmen affixed long metal bars that would be dragged over the poppy stalks to break them down. The ATVs were brought in because Afghan peasants will sometimes flood their fields to prevent ordinary tractors from doing the eradication. The entire operation, nominally an Afghan one, was being directed by employees of DynCorp, a large U.S. contractor. Most wore the unofficial uniform of the American contractor in Afghanistan: Oakley shades, goatee or beard, baseball cap, T-shirt, tan pants, work boots.

The first day of eradication was a bust because the eradication team drove to some poppy fields that lay outside the area local leaders had agreed to destroy. Daud left the following day for Kabul, but, two days later, Taliban fighters, some disguised in burkas, sprang a series of ambushes on the eradication force, pinning them down in an intense firefight, resulting in four wounded Afghan policemen. When I heard the news, I couldn't help thinking that if you deployed American cops to wipe out the crops and livelihoods of farmers in, say, Iowa, they might also find themselves on the receiving end of some shotgun fire.

The Taliban exploits such situations masterfully. Abdul Haq Hanif, a spokesman for the Taliban before he was arrested in February, acknowledged the linkage between his organization and the drug trade when he conceded to me what pretty much every Afghan and American official in Afghanistan has been saying for years: that the Taliban is, in part, a narcoterrorist organization, much like the FARC in Colombia. It's no surprise, then, that where poppy is grown, support for the Taliban runs high. In a poll

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: STEPHEN DUPONT/CONTACT PRESS IMAGES; GANDAMACK LODGE (2); JAMES HILL/CONTACT PRESS IMAGES; SAEED ACHAKZAI/REUTERS/LANDOV; JAMES HILL; SAM FAULKNER; NICK DANZIGER; JAMES HILL; ALL CONTACT PRESS IMAGES

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conducted in March by the Senlis Council, an independent research organization, 27 percent of those interviewed in Kandahar and Helmand provinces—where much of Afghanistan's poppy is grown—said they supported the Taliban, a number that is five times higher than in the rest of the country. And, thanks in part to drug money, the Taliban's coffers are flush: According to U.N. officials who track Taliban finances, Taliban fighters are now being paid $300 a month, four times the wage of the average Afghan police officer.

Poppy aside, one of the Taliban's biggest advantages in Afghanistan today is probably Pakistan. Hanif, the former Taliban spokesman, confirms to me that the group's leadership has settled across the border. A lanky, bearded 26-year-old whose family is from Nanghar Province in eastern Afghanistan, he studied at a Pakistani madrassa in Sadda, near the Afghan border, then was recruited by the Taliban while working as a journalist. "I was dealing with provincial Taliban leaders," he explained. "They were calling from Pakistan."

A similar point was made to me by a U.S. military official in Afghanistan with access to intelligence information. "Mullah Omar is still in Quetta," he said, referring to a city in southwestern Pakistan. "We know exactly where he is. He never comes into Afghanistan. We even know the compound he goes back and forth to." He described Pakistani cooperation in fighting the Taliban as "schizophrenic," pointing to the case of Mullah Osmani—a Taliban commander killed by a U.S. air strike inside Afghanistan last December—as an example of what Pakistan can do when it wants to help. "We would not have got him without Pakistani information," he said. On the other hand, a Western official based in Pakistan told me that detailed intelligence—known as "target folders"—on the locations of high-value Taliban and Al Qaeda officials provided by the U.S. government to Pakistan during the past six months has not been acted on. Whether the Pakistanis lack the capacity to arrest these targets or merely the will is an open question—though the impending fall election in Pakistan could very well be part of the explanation.

Further complicating matters, the Taliban has shifted military tactics in the past few months. When I embedded last summer with the 2-4 Infantry in Zabul, a remote province in southern Afghanistan, the U.S. commander there, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Sturek, described a recent two-hour battle against more than 100 Taliban fighters armed with machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, and recoilless rifles. At the time, judging from newly dug graves, Sturek estimated that 35 to 40 Taliban had been killed during the firefight. Now Taliban leaders have largely abandoned those kinds of mass battle formations, deeming them too costly. Instead, they are resorting to the tactics that have worked so well for insurgents in Iraq—suicide operations and IED attacks—and moving their men only in small groups.

This, in turn, raises a key question: Are militants in Afghanistan merely copycatting the insurgents in Iraq, or are they getting on-the-job training there? Art Keller, a retired CIA officer who ran a covert intelligence network last year in the tribal areas along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, believes it's the latter. "People are going there to learn the tactics and then come back," he tells me. Hamid Mir, a Pakistani journalist who is writing Osama bin Laden's biography, relates the story of "a Taliban commander … who told me that he was trained in Iraq, and subsequently he set up his own training camp in Zabul."

Equally disturbing is evidence of close cooperation between Al Qaeda and the Taliban. In December, months before he was killed, Mullah Dadullah, a leading Taliban commander, outlined Al Qaeda's close relationship with the Taliban to CBS News. "Osama bin Laden, thank God, is alive and in good health. We are in contact with his top aides and sharing plans and operations with each other." In a subsequent interview with Al Jazeera, Dadullah said that bin Laden supervised the suicide operation targeting Vice President Dick Cheney at Bagram Air Force base during his visit to Afghanistan in February, an attack that killed more than a dozen people, including an American soldier. The U.S. military dismisses that claim but admits that another Al Qaeda leader, Abu Laith Al Libi, was behind the operation. The American military official estimates that some 600 foreign militants tied to Al Qaeda are currently in Afghanistan—mostly Uzbeks, as well as some North Africans and Saudis. As for bin Laden himself, "The trail is ice cold. No intelligence on that in years."

As it turns out, the spring offensive that I came here hoping to observe never happened. Part of the explanation lies in the Taliban's tactical shift to an Iraq-style insurgency where conventional military operations are avoided. And, perhaps, with poppy-harvesting season in full swing, too many Taliban fighters were preoccupied with agricultural pursuits.

But some of the credit also goes to NATO, which, in March, launched a preemptive attack against the Taliban in southern Afghanistan. That month, 4,500 NATO soldiers moved around the Kanjaki dam in Helmand Province, an area the Taliban had controlled until last summer. The aim was to secure the surrounding region so that reconstruction could begin on the dam, which will eventually provide electricity to almost two million households in Kandahar and Helmand.

The Kanjaki operation reflects an admirable, and long overdue, push to secure swaths of the country that previously had been rife with violence. The Bush administration is now asking for more than $11 billion in aid over the next two years, much of it for the Afghan army and police. As Hobbes recognized four centuries ago, it is security that is the most important public good; and, as a senior Afghan diplomat pointed out to me, an effective police force will prove far more useful here in the short term than more computer schools.

Of course, if Afghanistan is to stabilize, it will take more than increased funding for police work. Pakistan must finally rein in its backward tribal belt, where Al Qaeda and the Taliban have long been regrouping—and which is now a staging ground for suicide attacks from London to Lahore. And the Afghan government will need to find a way to address crushing unemployment, which currently stands at 40 percent. Perhaps a public employment program dedicated to rebuilding the country's devastated infrastructure—and paid for by the United States—might do the trick. It would, at the very least, be a far more productive use of U.S. money than poppy eradication.

When Afghanistan makes the news in the States, it is usually for grim reasons. As a result, one thing the press rarely captures is how lovely a place Afghanistan can be. Kabul sits 7,000 feet above sea level and is surrounded by snow-tipped mountains. In spring, the sun warms soft winds during the day, and, at night, a pleasant chill descends with dusk and the muezzin's call to prayer. Afghans, when they aren't killing one another, are some of the most charming people in the world. Once in a while, it is even possible to catch a glimpse of why—in the 1970s, before the Soviets invaded—Kabul was a major pit stop on the hippie trail to India and something of a tourist destination in its own right. Someday, perhaps, the tourists will return. If Imdadullah and his comrades don't blow up the country first. ◆

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Paper Candidate

Bill Richardson v. his resumé.

RYAN LIZZA

Des Moines, Iowa

"Are you ready for some hot dogs?" says the ballpark announcer. "Let 'em know!"

Bill Richardson is ready. It's been a grueling day on the campaign trail—five events spread across some 350 miles of Iowa interstate—and, as we find our seats behind home plate for a minor league game in Des Moines, Richardson looks beat. A New Mexico wag once compared the governor's appearance to an unmade bed, and, right now, he looks the part. His black hair is tousled and his tie is gone. His collar is smeared with pancake makeup and his lapel is dusted with white specks of unknown origin.

But Richardson still has plenty of energy left—not only for a hot dog, a bag of popcorn, and a Diet Coke, which he asks his state trooper to fetch—but also to discuss his recent trip to North Korea to retrieve the remains of six American soldiers killed in the Korean war. "Maybe about two months ago," he casually explains, as if describing some political horse-trading with his legislature, "the North Koreans said to me, 'We want to do a gesture to you because we like you. You've been interested in remains. We're ready to give you from five to ten—unconditional. But you have to come and get them.'" The call, Richardson clarifies, came through the United Nations. "Their U.N. guy calls. His name is Ambassador Kim. K-I-M. They're all named Kim."

Richardson then contacted Bush's national security advisor, Steven Hadley, and told him he wanted to make the mission a bipartisan affair. Truth is, he just needed a ride. "What I was mainly interested in was an airplane," Richardson says as his food arrives and he maneuvers the overstuffed hot dog into his mouth. "So Hadley said—" Richardson pauses and turns to his trooper. "Jakey, you got a napkin?" The trooper passes Richardson a napkin, and he dabs his chin. "So Hadley said 'OK.'"

The hot dog is soon gone, and Richardson is finishing the popcorn now, as well as his North Korea yarn. "The White House said, 'We want to have Victor Cha'"— the National Security Council's top Korea expert—"'come too.' I said, 'Well, that'd be a signal. The North Koreans will like that.' I said, 'We need a plane.' Hadley said, 'Yeah, I know you do. I knew you were going to ask.' And I said, 'Well, how the fuck else are we going to get there?' And so we got a nice G5."

Brooks Kraft

This is the essence of Richardson's appeal—that he can blend seamlessly into a crowd of AAA baseball fans (unlike, say, John Kerry) while chatting about his negotiations with a member of the axis of evil (unlike, say, George W. Bush). Although many Democrats are smitten with Clinton, Obama, and Edwards, Richardson is enjoying a moment of heightened voter interest, even passing the psychologically crucial barrier of double-digit support in one Iowa poll. He is both the hot-dog-and-ballgame everyman and the seasoned international statesman. The latter is particularly alluring to an electorate yearning for the anti-Bush: someone with the foreign policy chops and diplomatic skills to repair America's tattered reputation and alliances, someone who understands the granular nuance of nuclear proliferation and the Iraq conflict and who isn't afraid to talk to our enemies.

This hunger for a leader who will undo the foreign policy of the Bush years is particularly powerful in internationalist Iowa, a state with a long tradition of peace churches, almost no military industry, and farmers who have always preferred selling to America's foes rather than isolating them. As Richardson and I chat about North Korean nukes, a middle-aged man shyly approaches the governor. "I just wanted to say, there's a lot of us here in Iowa who realize we need somebody like you to run our country," he tells Richardson. "I think your message of how much experience you've got in dealing with all the foreign policy, I think that rings really true here."

Everything about Richardson's impressive resumé seems to support the confidence that voters like this one have in him. He's a graduate of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, and he served as a foreign policy aide in Congress and at the State Department. As a congressman in the 1980s and 1990s, he made a name for himself as an international troubleshooter, parachuting into rogue states for face-to-face negotiations with dictators. His recent North Korean adventure shows that, even as governor of New Mexico, he has continued his role as America's de facto "undersecretary for thugs," a nickname he gave himself in the Clinton years.

Then again, a good resumé is not all it takes to win the nomination, and there are some signs that Richardson may not be the perfect candidate. In fact, as we get up from our seats to visit the play-by-play announcer's booth, Richardson does something I've never

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seen any politician do. There are two women sitting in front of us. They are both young and attractive, probably in their twenties. The governor rotates his large frame sideways and shimmies out of his row. The two women smile up at him. As he passes, Richardson reaches down and places his fingertips on the head of one of the women, tickling her scalp as he opens and closes his hand. Then, as he reaches for the next scalp, his hand suddenly aborts its mission, as if the governor realizes this wasn't such a good idea after all.

Richardson's touching problem isn't exactly news. In 2005, his lieutenant governor, Diane Denish, told *The Albuquerque Journal* that she goes out of her way to avoid sitting or standing next to Richardson because he's a little too grabby. "He pinches my neck. He touches my hip, my thigh, sort of the side of my leg," she told the newspaper, which illustrated the story with a photo of Richardson smiling mischievously as his hand reached around toward Denish's backside while the two sat next to each other at a public event.

The truth is that Richardson touches everyone this way. He routinely twists staffers into headlocks and pokes or bear-hugs people he's just met. At one event, I saw him grab a beefy union guy by the lapels and shout into his face, "Stay loose! No commitments yet!" His "political trait," he writes in his recent memoir, is to get "up close and personal." It's part of his charm and makes him a natural politician (he is, after all, the Guinness Book of World Records champion for a politician shaking the most hands in eight hours—13,392 at the New Mexico State Fair in 2002). It's also what enables him to negotiate with dictators—to treat them with the same level of cordiality as more upstanding members of the international community. But Richardson's informal style is not without its drawbacks. On the most basic level, giving an unsolicited scalp tickle to a stranger is peculiar behavior for a presidential candidate, and Richardson's touching has fueled a nasty whisper campaign that he's unelectable. But, even if you put aside those rumors, Richardson's style betrays deeper problems with him as a candidate.

Bill Richardson campaigning with a personal touch in New Hampshire.

It's MIDDAY, and 50 elderly Iowans are gathered at the Witwer Center in Cedar Rapids to hear Richardson's stump speech. He stands on a small stage in the cafeteria as members of the audience nibble cookies and listen carefully. He's no Bill Clinton. Richardson's feet are stiffly glued to the floor, but he gestures dramatically with his hands and bends his torso in all directions at the waist. It sometimes looks as if he is doing the robot. On the issues, Richardson is to the left of, but ideologically close to, his opponents. He says he would get the troops out of Iraq, though faster than Clinton, Obama, or Edwards. He favors energy independence, universal health care, and better schools. His real argument is that he's the most experienced candidate.

He delivers his pitch in a somewhat meta style. Rather than detailing his experience, more often than not, he simply tells his audience, "I have the most experience." Rather than radiating optimism through the power of his words, he simply explains, "I want you to know that I'm optimistic."

But, for all his talk of experience, Richardson is not so much a foreign policy expert as he is a born negotiator. Richardson himself traces this style to a life spent navigating "between worlds," which is the title of his memoir. Even today, Richardson's ability to embrace duality is impressive: He gets accolades for being the first Latino presidential candidate, but he is also arguably the WASPiest of the contenders, the only major Democrat to attend a New England prep school

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and certainly the only one who has written movingly about a cherished Brooks Brothers blazer. With a stern and demanding Anglo dad and a much younger and more indulgent Mexican mom, he grew up in luxury south of the border. He was chauffeured to school and saw up-close his father's hobnobbing with the Mexican and American elite, including his dad's friend Dwight Eisenhower. And yet, by day, Richardson would get into scrapes and play baseball with kids from the Mexico City slums surrounding his family's mansion.

When he was sent off to Middlesex in Massachusetts—where, Richardson has noted, "the boys all seemed to be upper-middle-class or wealthy and white"—he was no longer the elite son of an American bank executive but "Pancho," the Latino kid who still thought in Spanish and had trouble with his English. "Here we go again," Richardson thought upon arrival. "How am I going to fit in? How am I going to be accepted?" He figured out he could win over his classmates by impressing them as an athlete, and he was the first eighth-grader to make the varsity baseball team.

Richardson was similarly calculating about finding a place for himself at Tufts. He quickly established himself as cruise director of his class, personally organizing a trip to Mexico for his friends and rising through the ranks of his fraternity, Delta Tau Delta, to become its president. Ever the diplomat, one of his first decisions was to invite a group of Black Panthers to speak to his fellow Delts. But he also learned to relish hardnosed politics. During one contentious fraternity meeting, some brothers attempted to overturn President Richardson's ban on smoking pot in the house. A colleague recommended he invoke *Robert's Rules of Order* to discipline the proceedings. "What the hell is that?" a perplexed Richardson asked. Instead, he quelled the rebellion by threatening to bring in the dean of students. After that victory, he worked quietly to place political allies in key positions throughout the Tufts student government, what he's proudly called his "Lyndon Johnson moment."

Although Richardson was a college student in the late '60s, unlike most of his generation he hardly knew whether he was a Democrat or a Republican. Later on, as a Hill aide, he treasured dealmaking far more than ideology. New Mexico proved to be the ideal political landscape for Richardson, and he audaciously moved there in 1977 without knowing a single person in the state. As *The Economist* once explained, "New Mexican politics is still about jobs, contracts and personal loyalty, not ideology. And Mr. Richardson personifies this." By 1982, he had won a congressional seat. As a freshman representative, Richardson was one of the most effective members in a class of unusually ambitious pols, including Harry Reid, Barbara Boxer, Dick Durbin, and Tom Ridge. He eventually convinced the leadership to appoint him to the Intelligence committee so he could indulge his foreign policy interests. It was through that assignment that he began his freelance diplomacy.

In 1992, Clinton passed over Richardson for a Cabinet slot. Richardson was crushed—"I'm hurting," he told Clinton when the president broke the news to him over the phone—but the rejection gave him the opportunity to play world statesman. The White House began to use Richardson as an unofficial envoy and back channel to regimes it wouldn't talk to directly. In 1994, he tried to convince the North Koreans to hand over two American airmen. The following year, he persuaded Saddam Hussein to give up two Western engineers who wandered into Iraq from Kuwait. And, in 1996, he sprang some Red Cross contractors from the clutches of a Sudanese warlord. At other times, he has met with Slobodan Milošević ("wily" and "charming"), Haiti's Raoul Cédras, the leadership of Burma, and Fidel Castro ("more dandruff than I'd ever seen on anyone"). In his second term, Clinton rewarded Richardson with stints as U.N. ambassador and energy secretary. In his memoir, Richardson explains his basic diplomatic philosophy: "A personal connection can transcend even the deepest ideological differences."

That's how he approaches not just international thugs but Iowans, too. But there are limits to an approach that turns every personal encounter into a kind of negotiating session. Richardson's remarks to the senior citizens are over, and the first question for him is about military spending. A woman wants to know if the governor would favor eliminating what she says is the 5 percent of the Pentagon budget that goes to "our strategic air command" and "Star Wars–era type of missile defense systems" and earmark the money for education instead.

Nothing in Richardson's public statements or on his website suggests he agrees with the woman, but his instinct is to find points of agreement. First he tries the I'm-with-you-in-principle-but-not-the-details approach. "Look, I agree with you. I would redirect priorities toward human needs." But he also strains to point out that there are areas where he would *increase* the Pentagon budget. He wants more men and women in the Army and for them to have better armor. She frowns, and it looks like he might be losing her. He circles back to her question and promises to cut wasteful Pentagon spending, especially in Iraq, even throwing in a gratuitous jab at Halliburton. "So I'm with you," he assures the woman. But this is a negotiation, and Richardson doesn't want her to think she's won everything. "I don't want you to say, 'Well, you know, he's with me a hundred percent.'"

Now the woman is confused. "So to clarify, then," she asks precisely, "are you saying, though, that five percent, or even the fifteen percent, you'd sustain within the Pentagon budget to continue to pay for things for a war machine?" Richardson begins to fold. "No, no," he says. "I think you can easily maybe even go higher than the five percent." Again, the woman wants a clarification: "And shift it into education and health care?" Richardson is faced with a choice between making a personal connection and maintaining his ideological differences. He goes with the former. "Sure. Yeah, I believe so."

On March 20, 2003, the day after U.S. bombs dropped on Baghdad, Bill Richardson signed an optimistic neocon statement on the war. "Together with successful democratic reform in Iraq," it read, "the Gulf has the potential of making a clean break with a past rooted in repression and entering into the growing global community of democratic states." The statement was released by Freedom House, the human rights organization beloved by hawks and the interventionist wings of both parties. Richardson was a trustee of Freedom House and had been the organization's chairman before he became governor. Other signatories included Kenneth Adelman, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Diana Negroponte, and James Woolsey.

But, early this year, Richardson's neocon moment ended—right about the time he started campaigning in Iowa. His new position is about as far as possible from his old one: He wants all the troops out of Iraq this calendar year—"The difference I have with the other candidates is I'm saying no residual troops *at all*," he told me. And his first big speech on foreign policy, in contrast to his idealistic Freedom House declaration, called for "a new realism." In April, a few months after he gave it, I joined him in New York for a candidate forum with Al Sharpton

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and his National Action Network. After the event, a reporter asked Richardson under what circumstances he would use U.S. troops to intervene militarily. Without hesitation, he made the sound realist case. "Only if America's national security interests are affected," he said. I asked him what he would have done in the case of Rwanda. He paused for a moment and thought. "I would have intervened," he said, quickly adding, "I would have pushed for a peacekeeping force." And if it failed? Would he have sent U.S. troops? "I think in the case of human rights and genocide, the answer is yes."

Maybe Richardson is truly a realist and was just experiencing a temporary bout of foreign policy idealism back in 2003. Or else he's always been an idealist but the reality of the Iraq war reordered his views. Or perhaps there's a simpler answer, especially once you know that, even as he served as chairman of the hyper-idealist Freedom House, he had another job: senior managing director at Kissinger McLarty Associates, the private sector redoubt of hyper-realism. The safe bet is that Richardson, despite his years on the world stage, has never developed any fixed foreign policy ideology. Or any fixed political identity, either. In 1996, Richardson, who was then nearing the end of his 14 years representing New Mexico in the House, told a reporter, "I was a conservative Democrat who became a progressive Democrat who's now a moderate." And, these days, Richardson is methodically staking out ground to the left of all his Democratic rivals.

An absence of ideology might seem like the perfect antidote to the Bush years. And Richardson is not the only politician to have done an ideological flip-flop on Iraq. But, in Richardson's case, being unmoored from a clear set of principles has led to a series of errors in judgment that extends to more issues than just the war. His reputation as a foreign policy expert rests on his negotiating missions rather than on meaty policy work, and that has allowed the legend of Richardson the statesman to persist despite a history of bad calls.

In 1985, he voted for aid to the Contras, a controversial position for a Democrat to take. Then the Iran-Contra scandal broke out. Richardson reversed his position and admitted he'd made a mistake.

In 1991, Richardson voted against giving George H.W. Bush the authority to go to war against Saddam. Once again, he later admitted he got it wrong. "In retrospect, that was a mistake," he writes in his memoir. "The right vote was the one cast by the majority of my House and Senate colleagues, who supported the first President Bush's request for the authority to remove Iraq from Kuwait by force if necessary."

In that same book, Richardson recounts how his proudest achievement in the House was the starring role he played in helping Bill Clinton pass NAFTA. As the Democrat in charge of gathering votes for the pro-NAFTA side, he was so devoted to its passage that he actually set up a joint whip operation with Newt Gingrich's team. "NAFTA, in my view, was critically important," he writes in his memoir, which was published just two years ago. When I asked Richardson about his role in NAFTA, he said he doesn't regret his vote, but he has changed his mind about some aspects of free trade. "I guess you'd call me more of a fair-trader now," he admits.

Even if he doesn't measure up on substance, Richardson's style has always been a political asset. He so dominates New Mexico politics that back home they call him "King Bill" or "Govzilla." After being reelected with almost 70 percent of the vote, he figured his New Mexico success could easily translate into Prezilla. Richardson thinks his informal approach is precisely the kind of authenticity that voters want. But, in presidential politics, where every utterance is sifted for its ideological content and examined for clues about the candidate's readiness for the job, style takes you only so far. After the first Democratic

Brooks Kraft

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debate, during which he inexplicably declared that his model Supreme Court Justice was Byron White, one of the two dissenters in *Roe* v. *Wade*, Richardson was asked how that answer squares with his pro-choice views. Richardson challenged the very idea that White had anything to do with the *Roe* decision and argued that it was decided in the '80s, when White was no longer on the Court. After watching the scene unfold, the popular Democratic blogger Mark Kleiman was devastating: "He just doesn't seem very smart, or very thoughtful."

Some candidates can overcome a track record of poor judgment and inconsistencies with a polished presentation on the stump. (Think Mitt Romney or John Edwards.) But, as with the Byron White head-smacker, Richardson has again and again created the impression that he doesn't know the basics. In March, Alicia Menendez, a reporter for the news channel RNN, asked Richardson how he would vote on the Iraq supplemental if he were in the Senate. "I'm just not familiar with the supplemental," he told her. "Which one is that?" At the first Democratic debate, in April, Richardson was asked if he "would vote to fund the troops." He immediately answered "no," even though that's not his position. During a recent appearance on "Meet the Press," Tim Russert confronted Richardson with a devastating catalogue of the governor's contradictions on Iraq, immigration, his tenure as energy secretary, gun policy, and—the final, cruel shot—how he could be both a Red Sox fan, as he often says he is, and a Yankees fan, as he claims in his book. Richardson seemed deeply offended by the barrage. "I've been in public life twenty-five years. You're going to find a lot of these," he sputtered. "It seems you've found them all here."

Richardson is often just not that precise when he speaks, treating conversations with voters and reporters more like casual chats rather than interviews where his words will be scrutinized. Sometimes his gaffes are small and meaningless. After Al Sharpton, who has never held an elected position, introduced him at the forum in New York, Richardson said, "All the good things the governor said about me are true." Other mistakes are more eyebrow-raising. When discussing his plan to negotiate peace in Iraq, he often refers to the country's "three religious groups," a small but odd blunder for a candidate hawking his foreign policy experience, especially his deep familiarity with the Muslim world.

In one Iowa forum, Richardson noted that "we also are moving North Korea toward eliminating nuclear weapons." Not exactly. The negotiations are about shutting down a nuclear facility, not getting rid of their current stockpile, though that is, of course, an eventual goal. Richardson repeated the statement in a phone interview with me, which took place after his Byron White episode, when he was trying to be particularly careful about his statements. After placing me on hold—"put him on silent or whatever, because I want to just talk to Barbara"—he clarified the remark. "Let me just amend one thing I said. My view is that they will keep some kind of nuclear presence," he said. "I don't believe they will dismantle everything."

During a question-and-answer session after a speech about Darfur at the University of Northern Iowa, a student from Sierra Leone asked the governor a question about the causes of conflict. "Usually, when you have power, you don't want to give it up," Richardson said. "I remember in your country, Charles Taylor, he was around when I was at the U.N. He's no longer around, right? He's in exile somewhere. Your country still has conflict." Taylor was actually the leader of Liberia. He is not in exile but in a prison in the Hague, where he is standing trial this month. (It's one of the most important war-crimes cases since Nuremberg.) And the long-running conflict in Sierra Leone is over.

After the speech, Richardson was all back slaps, winks, and nods. He gamely posed for a picture with a student who is collecting photographs of candidates holding his Mr. Potato Head doll. "Do I look like a fool or what?" he laughed. And he tried to find those points of commonality that are his trademark, even if he had to strain a little to do it. To two Sudanese students, he asked, "Do you know who Manute Bol is?" Then, turning to me, he asked the same question, explaining that Bol, an American basketball star, is a member of the Dinka tribe of Sudan. Richardson held his hand above his head. "Very tall."

As I watched Richardson, I realized that there is no artifice to the man, which is an endearing quality for a presidential candidate. Lurking behind Richardson's grabby, clumsy style is a guy who will do anything to be loved. And that's how many Democrats view the United States right now—a nation that desperately needs the world to love us again. Richardson may be a good Cabinet member for the next president, but, despite his charm and likeability, the next president needs to be more than a frat-boy-in-chief who believes that personal connections can overcome all the world's ideological fissures. We've already been down that road.

Back at the baseball game, where the Iowa Cubs are crushing Richardson's own Albuquerque Isotopes, the governor is a whirl of energy and one-liners. We ride an elevator to the broadcast booth. "You're the owner, huh?" Richardson says to a man escorting us. "Why are you kicking the shit out of us?"

The governor settles into a chair between the Cubs' two play-by-play announcers. There's a pop fly to shallow right center. The Cubs shortstop falls down trying to make the catch, and an Isotope makes a sprint for second. "He's out!" Richardson interjects. The announcer, Toby Hyde, concurs. "Bill Richardson is right," he says. "He's out." He adds, with just a trace of sarcasm, "I'll let you call a couple of plays."

Richardson's bet that the personal always trumps the ideological is soon tested. This is Iowa, after all, where even the ballpark announcers are budding David Yepsens. Hyde asks Richardson what the one thing is that people should know about him, and the governor makes his resumé pitch. "It's that I've got experience," he says. "I've been secretary of energy. I'm governor of a state. I'm doing well. I've got foreign policy experience. I just got back from North Korea … ."

If Hyde is impressed, he doesn't let on. Richardson tries to keep things casual. "I just had the biggest, best hot dog I've ever had," he says. "And I'm on this diet. It makes me miserable. What a hot dog. I may have another one." But it turns out Hyde is a bit of an energy policy wonk, and, in between plays, he draws Richardson into a detailed discussion about the merits of cellulosic- versus corn-based ethanol. "How about wind?" Hyde asks. "Wind's sort of the forgotten of the renewables." Dictators may be susceptible to Richardson's nonideological approach, but Iowans, it turns out, are not.

After exiting the booth, with the announcers safely out of earshot, Richardson cackles and scrunches his face. "The guy was talking to me about wind energy!" It's clear from his amused expression that he feels like the interview—and the long day of campaigning—was a success. But, as we ride the elevator down to the ground floor of the stadium, the car is quiet, and the governor suddenly gets a pensive look on his face. Has he realized his mistakes? He breaks the silence. "I'm gonna get another hot dog on the way out," he declares. "Screw it." ◆

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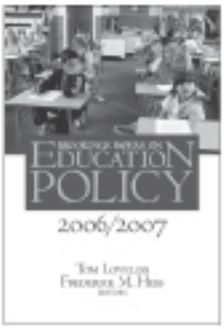

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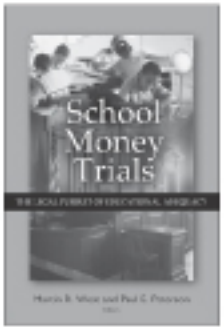

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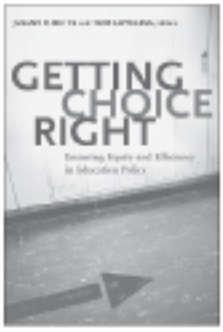

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

INSTEAD OF STORIES

On December 22, 1989, the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu fled Bucharest, his helicopter taking off at 12:08 p.m. A new Romanian film called *12:08 East of Bucharest* is set exactly sixteen years later in, obviously, a town to the east of the capital. The local television station, which has a talk show, plans a program dealing with the town's reaction to the dictator's flight—the cheering in the town square and so forth. The talk-show host gets refusals from the two guests he wanted: he has to settle for a boozy professor and a pompous old pensioner.

The program goes poorly. Political responses from the guests are vapid, listless. The professor, it turns out, was drinking in a bar on the square that day in 1989; the old man folds paper boats on the table in front of him and issues imprecise mouthings. Calls from viewers don't liven things much. At last, as doldrums are reigning supreme, a woman calls in and asks the host: "Do you know that it's snowing outside?" Such is the fervor that still rages in this town about the revolution that changed the country.

This talk-show section of *12:08 East of Bucharest* is done pretty much in real time. It lasts as long as the broadcast—something like thirty minutes—and thus runs the risk of being equally limp. An ancient theater problem with characters who are purposely boring is how to keep them from boring the audience. The writer and director of this film, Corneliu Porumboiu, is aware of the risk and deliberately engages it. He wants us to taste existence in this town as, with some amusement and indeed some beauty in the filming, he reproduces life here. The television talk show serves as the core of the scenes before and after it. Paradoxically, the picture would have failed if that talk show didn't bore us a bit. It fits into the whole like a key piece of a puzzle.

TOMASZ WALENTA

The picture—Porumboiu's first—opens with misty evening shots of the town, proving yet again that dull places can look pretty, and it closes at the end of the next day with the lighting of the street lamps. Family scenes involving each of the three principals precede and follow the talk-show section. With all these materials conjoined, Porumboiu depicts the slow muffled-drum march of most of the town's lives from cradle to grave.

More: the film has a political edge. Ceauşescu was one of the worst men of his time. His victims certainly knew it, and the milling thousands who protested in the streets knew it. But television didn't show us the many, many thousands who didn't mill. Most people, says this film, live along as best they can, whatever the government, obeying this regime or that, content just to be allowed to trudge through day after day. For these reasons, presumably, the old man on the show says he didn't even particularly mind the dictator, as he folds his paper boats.

12:08 EAST OF BUCHAREST
Tartan

PRIVATE PROPERTY
New Yorker

TEN CANOES
Palm

Porumboiu's film, sadly funny though it sometimes is, is an act of daring in itself, challenging our expectations of drama in order to show us that, for most people most of the time, life is not dramatic; it is only—if they are lucky—sequential. For many Romanians, surely, the end of the dictatorship was joyous and liberating, but for many others (more?) it was something that happened off in the capital or in another city while at home one kept on sweeping floors or hammering nails. The implication is that this is hardly a uniquely Romanian fact. Kafka is said to have written that "every revolution evaporates, leaving behind only the slime of a new bureaucracy." Possibly the anti-Ceauşescu revolution has by now evaporated and has left behind a new bureaucracy—I don't know—but, for Porumboiu, the great change so slightly disturbed the people in this town that they can hardly remember or care that it happened. The old man, who later shops for a Santa Claus suit for a party, is more intensely engaged with the shopkeeper than he was on the show.

From Belgium comes *Private Property*, which quintessentially approaches the Romanian film in concept, though with much more complex and heated means. The director, Joachim Lafosse, who wrote the screenplay with François Pirot, puts a dysfunctional family through several confrontations and crises; yet here, too, our expectation that crises will lead to some sort of resolution is deliberately left unsatisfied. Near the end a ghastly accident happens that shivers everyone, but it doesn't resolve the film's troubles. Porumboiu showed us that many people lead their lives like trains on tracks; Lafosse shows that people who are moderately well-off and educated may find themselves in more broils, but resolu-

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tions are no more certainly available to them than to others.

Isabelle Huppert plays a fortyish divorcée with twin sons in their early twenties; the three live together in a capacious farmhouse in southern (French-speaking) Belgium. She has a job and supports the family: one son is a student, the other seems to busy himself only with household repairs. They all quarrel quite a lot, the sons with each other and both of them with their mother—quarrels minor and major that seem rooted in their lives.

Visually, Lafosse presents his film as a kind of study. Many scenes are literally framed in large doorways; and as far as I could see, there was never a cut within a scene. If three people are eating at a table, that is the shot. No cutting from one face to another, no two-shots; three people sit at a table. Thus we are given something of the feeling of eavesdroppers, rather than a catered-to audience.

Huppert has a lover of about her age—a Fleming, as the sons repeatedly note—and they usually meet in his car for sex. He wants her to sell the house and start a bed-and-breakfast with him. The sons strenuously object. Huppert's ex-husband, who visits occasionally and is still close to his sons, shares their concerns in this matter. Troubles erupt further, and at last Huppert storms out of the house to live with a woman friend. Then the accident happens. Soon the film ends.

But one of the points of the film is that nothing is settled. Lafosse hasn't carefully shaped a story: he has placed us in the company of these people for ninety-five minutes, not to delve into a deep theme or to unfold any startling conclusion, but simply to press us up against some fairly volatile human beings whom, he hopes, we will care about.

Thus *Private Property*, too, is a daring film—even more than the Romanian film, because it is so full of conflicts that some rounded conclusion is even more expectable. Because Lafosse is relying on these characters to hold us, he has to make sure that they are interesting. He succeeds. The writing, to judge by the subtitles, is keen enough, and the performances brim with conviction. Huppert is both reticent and strong, commanding though quiet, yet fierce enough when she needs to be. She has had these unique characteristics throughout her career, able to speak through silence and to flare when needed. (Compare *Violette* and *The Piano Teacher*.) Her role here calls on a wide range of her now-cherished qualities.

The two sons, who are twins, are in fact played by two brothers, Yannick Renier and Jérémie Renier, both of whom excel. (Some may recognize Jérémie as the boy in *La Promesse* and *L'Enfant*, both directed by the Dardenne brothers.) Among the Reniers and Huppert, the deft interplay and shadings, apprehensions and comprehensions, demonstrate that in addition to Lafosse's visual sensitivity, he is clearly skilled with actors.

A sort of sub-genre has been growing in recent years. In films made in countries with primitive strata of existence, now or in the past, modern people—often otherwise notable—have been playing primitive roles. Burkina Faso and Senegal are two of the countries where this has happened—and now Australia. In this new film, *Ten Canoes*, a well-known Aboriginal painter plays a virtually naked sorcerer with a bone thrust through his septum. Many of these naked actors are known to Australians for their other achievements: a prefatory note about them would benefit the picture in this country.

As the film opens, we float through expanses of landscape in color. (From time to time the camera switches to black-and-white. No pattern is evident. Color doesn't mean the present, or its absence the past: the mode simply changes from time to time.) A rich voice with an Aboriginal accent begins by paraphrasing the opening of *Star Wars* ("Once upon a time in a land far away"), then laughs and says that this is a different story. But this opening tells us something about the cultural position of this narrator, who will return often in the course of the film.

We now go far back in centuries among the Aborigines, as the voice-over tells us that we are about to see a story unlike any we could possibly know. This is quite untrue. The story is not strange or novel. A girl disappears from one tribe, and all the tribesmen think that she has been kidnapped by an enemy tribe. Fighting breaks out, time passes, and at last the girl returns. She has been absent for quite different reasons. There is no cogent drama: the film is a series of incidents.

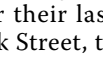
The film's rewards are in the enactment of these people's lives: the hunting, the eating, the polygamy, the role of the sorcerer, the intricate face and body painting, the music, and especially the making of a canoe. The title apparently means the ten men—one man, one canoe, in this world—who are principals in the picture. Inevitably this film—written by Rolf de Heer, who co-directed with Peter Djigirr—has the interest of a good travelogue, but it becomes almost an instance of pride in their history if we know that almost all of these primitive people were played by modern Aboriginal men and women, most of whom are recognized artists in other fields.

And, curiously enough, *Ten Canoes* is related to the Romanian and French films above: it, too, rewards us by means other than a well-turned story. ◆

David Hajdu on Music

TZADDIK

Tonic, an ascetic little hostel for outré music and arty noise in the longtime cultural center of outré artiness, Manhattan's Lower East Side, closed down in April after nine years of hot-and-cold business—a casualty of engulfing gentrification and bureaucratic harassment, according to the club's owners. For their last night on Norfolk Street, they arranged to go out as grandly as possible and booked John Zorn, the fifty-three-year-old godhead of the downtown musical scene, to lead two sets of performances by an ad hoc assemblage of musicians in his sphere. The line for admission started forming more than three hours before showtime, and it stretched along two blocks before the doors opened. The evening was chilly and wet. I counted three open umbrellas, including my own.



JOHN ZORN

A film crew was interviewing people on line, and one of the men in a group ahead of me waved down the camera operator. "If half these bullshit parasites came down here before this place closed," he told the film-maker, "it wouldn't have to close!" As the crew moved down the sidewalk, the piqued guy asked me if I had a cigarette, and I asked him to tell me about some of his favorite Tonic shows. He said this was only his second time at the club, although he loves John Zorn and had seen him play elsewhere.

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About ten minutes before the first set was scheduled to start, Zorn came striding down the street, parallel to the queue, just a few feet from the people, glaring straight ahead. He was carrying his alto saxophone in a case and wearing baggy desert-camouflage pants and an orange T-shirt—the same clothes (or precisely matching ones) that he had worn each of the last three times I had seen him perform this year, once earlier at Tonic and twice at The Stone, the tiny storefront performance space that Zorn himself owns and operates on Avenue C. As he sped past, fans burst into a chant of "Zorn! Zorn!" He glowered in silence, and when the camera pointed at him he shook his head, declining the attention. I could only wonder what the shouting fans and the film crew had in mind. Why would they think that someone who makes a point regularly to appear dressed in camouflage and a T-shirt would want attention?

In the music he put together that night, Zorn made a bookend to the concerts that he had organized for Tonic shortly after the club opened in 1998, events that had helped considerably to establish Tonic's credibility as a bohemian refuge. On both occasions, Zorn served in part as a creative shepherd—selecting, organizing, and hosting the performers—and also as the special guest star of his own show, sort of a recherché hydra of Ed Sullivan and the Beatles. On the last night at Tonic, the musicians drifted in and out of the club and all around the bandstand, and their playing styles varied—more than two dozen artists performed in various configurations into the early hours of the morning—though they were connected in their common passion for free improvisation, their take-it-or-leave-it attitude toward conventional Western tonality, and their conception of noise as music.

None of this thinking has been new or radical in the domains of classical music, jazz, or hardcore rock and punk for years. But neither have the ideals of free improvisation, atonality, or noise-as-music poured out of the rarefied waters of art music into the mainstream to join the standards of value applied on *American Idol*. Indeed, the unifying principle of much of the work performed at Tonic from its opening shows to its closing ones, as with a great deal of music at other new-music venues such as the Knitting Factory and The Stone, is not really its ostensible newness or radicalism, but rather its unacceptability in popular culture. Though commonly regarded as insular and self-referential, the world of John Zorn and his peers and followers is integrally engaged with the mainstream, in that it defines itself by its conscientious alienation from it. The music is all about status.

Zorn appeared onstage after about half an hour of performances by four small groups, one of which featured the delightful pianist Sylvie Courvoisier, who produced a spirited rhythmic sound collage by rapping and strumming every part of the inside of the instrument. One of the drummers used a violin bow to play the steel rim of his snare drum. A percussionist thwacked on a Jew's harp and yammered loopy gibberish while his partner did a slow, rudimentary tap dance. It was all resolutely *different*. And yet it was all nearly identical to the neo-Dada happenings of the Warhol era—the 1960s again, but without the ameliorating benefit of the drugs.

Performing in a trio with piano and drums, Zorn played an improvisation of sound graffiti sprayed in bursts and flurrying splashes of accelerating propulsion. He began with a series of short modal phrases, but quickly abandoned modality and, in little time, dropped tonality altogether, screeching and cronking. Early in his career, Zorn began to develop an expansive vocabulary of extramusical sounds that he could produce with precision on the alto saxophone, often by using only the mouthpiece of the instrument, sometimes by playing the mouthpiece through a bowl of water. For a few years, he tried to devise a system to identify all the noises he could make and to notate them with hieroglyphic-like symbols, an effort along the lines of his idol Harry Partch's attempts to invent new scales and notational methods to accommodate the odd tones, microtones, and quasi-tones that emanated from the instruments that he constructed out of old light bulbs, empty liquor bottles, and driftwood. To the uninitiated, the sounds that Zorn produces may sometimes seem like assaultive noise blurted out arbitrarily. In fact, they are assaultive noise crafted with meticulous care. For this piece, Zorn employed the entire saxophone, though he blew into it so hard that the instrument rattled in his hands and appeared about to fly apart.

After the first set, Zorn spoke briefly—very briefly—to a small group of fans and a couple of journalists assembled near the door to the club's office. "The yuppies are taking over," he warned us in a vatic hush. "We're all fucked." He lowered his head and hurried away, presumably to prepare for the second set.

The last night at Tonic presented John Zorn—a guarded man protective of his public image—as he likes to be seen: a martyrly champion of a noble and doomed cause, a victim of institutional indifference and maltreatment. He revels in his vaunted status as an outsider and a cultural insurgent; hence the meticulous screeching and cronking, as well as the guerrilla's pants. For years, before he switched to the orange T-shirt, he performed in one printed with the phrase "Die Yuppie Scum." In the few interviews he has given, Zorn has been quick to articulate his hero worship for artistic dissidents and outcasts such as Partch, Charles Ives, Joseph Cornell, and Harry Smith—his determination to follow their example, and his fear of oppression by giant, faceless institutions. "I think the outsiders, the individualists, the people who have a messianic belief in themselves and are able to stick with their vision despite all odds … the people that can stick with that, they're the ones that are really going to make a difference in the world," he said in an interview with the magazine *JazzTimes*. "And they will always be a small number, and I've always aspired to be one of that number." And this: "I see enormous corporations acting like slave masters, like the return of the pharaohs. I see co-opting all around. I see McDonald's everywhere. I see the destruction of … the small mom and pop stores.… That is the big problem—the pharaohs controlling us. Sure, there will be independent artists, always. But they'll always be on the fringe."

Apart from the vainglory of such messiah talk, there is a sizable problem with Zorn's ongoing self-projection as a repressed, misunderstood, and underappreciated musical outcast. It is the fact that he is now a well-established and celebrated figure, a composer recognized not only in the downtown institutions in which he has always thrived, and in the sibling bodies that he has founded and run for the advancement of his own work and that of his kindred souls and protégés, such as The Stone and his record company Tzadik, but in major cultural institutions as well. The pharaohs of the arts establishment have bestowed honor and riches upon him. Last year he won a MacArthur "genius" grant ($500,000), and in March he received the William Schuman Award from the Columbia University School of the Arts, one of the largest grants given to an American musician ($50,000). The latter is given for lifetime achieve-

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ment, and has gone previously to composers such as Milton Babbitt, Gunther Schuller, and Steve Reich.

But the achievements of Zorn's lifetime so far are a mixed lot—all of them extraordinary in one way or another, some indisputably significant, others dubious. He is certainly important and may well turn out to be historic as a symbol of musical adventurism and an inspiration to other composers—like Eric Satie, an enigmatic provocateur with an outsize mystique who stirred acolytes to do work better than his own. Over the decades since Zorn emerged as a model of the free-spirited genre-bending associated with downtown Manhattan, he has drawn countless musicians and composers into his orbit, and he has recorded or performed with dozens of them, including some fine ones, among them the composer and trumpeter Dave Douglas, the guitarist Bill Frisell, the pianists Anthony Coleman and Wayne Horvitz, the cellist Erik Friedlander, and the drummer Joey Baron.

Zorn is an exceptional artist, without question, because he prizes and seeks exceptionalism above all. This is not to say that he is exceptionally good at his art. What he is good at—so very good as to suggest a kind of genius—is being exceptional. Unfortunately, uniqueness is not an aesthetic value; it is a term of classification. To say that Zorn is one of a kind, as he certainly is, is to ignore the larger matters of his nature as an artist and, more significantly, the nature of his work, much of which is thin and gimmicky, and some of which is elementally corrupt.

Through his fiercely individualistic modes of working, Zorn deters attention to the work itself. He is obsessed with processes and systems, and he is often cavalier about their results. In the small-ensemble performances and albums that first brought him attention, Zorn led improvising musicians in what he called "game" pieces. Zorn did not compose them, exactly, but was responsible for them in that he invented and supervised the unprecedented system of rules for their spontaneous invention by the performers. He devised a set of signal cards, each of which indicated, in code, when certain musicians should play: now, the brass instruments; now, drums and guitar; now, the person to the left of the last person who played; now, nobody.... Further upending the standard notions of compositional authority or prerogative, Zorn left it to the musicians to call for the cards to be changed. His role was to stand in front of the group, hold up the cards, and switch them at the players' demand. The meaning of these cards changed as he added body-language cues, such as how high he held the sign and whether or not he was wearing a baseball cap at the moment.

The byzantine rules—to which the audience was never privy—were the artwork, such as it was. As Zorn explained, "What I came up with was this kind of game structure that talks about when people play and when they don't play but doesn't talk about what they do at all." Not what, but when: the content, the music itself, scarcely mattered to Zorn, who was concerned mainly with the novelty of its system of generation, a scheme not devised in service to the expression of human feelings, but brazenly indifferent, if not hostile, to them. As such, Zorn's game work was less an innovation in the creative process than a debasement of it.

Without making too much of his admiration for messiah figures, it is clear that a dominant theme of Zorn's career has been his dedication to attempting to invent new musical paradigms and launch new movements. At some point in his late twenties or early thirties, Zorn grew more interested in his Jewish heritage, as many artists (and non-artists) of all backgrounds turn to their roots as they age. The results of Zorn's ethnic awakening have included a body of more than five hundred shortish compositions with the group title "Masada," named for the famous Jewish martyrdom site of the Roman era; his record label Tzadik (*tzaddik* denotes a righteous person, a saintly person, in Hebrew); and an umbrella effort that is broader, more ambitious, and more nebulous, which Zorn calls Radical Jewish Culture.

Zorn has overseen the performance and the recording of the Masada pieces by ensembles of various sorts—art rockers, chamber groups, and a jazz quartet featuring Zorn on alto saxophone, Dave Douglas on trumpet, Greg Cohen on bass, and Joey Baron on drums. As compositions, the Masada pieces are simple and repetitious, inspired loosely by traditional melodies and, for the most part, constructed with the standard tools: minor keys and folk-dance rhythms. Many of the tunes are charming and elegiac, unique among Zorn's generally oppressive work; and Douglas, Cohen, and Baron are all players of uncommon sensitivity, employed well here. Zorn, too, though scarcely on the level of his bandmates as an instrumentalist, plays with rare nuance and delicacy on some of the Masada CDs.

Beyond the Masada pieces, the concerts and recording projects organized by Zorn under the rubric of Radical Jewish Culture have been a mishmash of works, some related so tenuously to Jewish culture that Zorn's application of the phrase seems less radical than cynical. An early example, and just one of many, is Zorn's multi-artist, two-CD tribute to Burt Bacharach, titled *Great Jewish Music*. The collection features a hodgepodge of artists associated with Zorn, as well as Sean Lennon, playing Bacharach hits such as "Close to You," "Do You Know the Way to San Jose," "What's New Pussycat," and "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance." The music is delightful pop schmaltz; but apart from the Yiddish origins of that term, it is no more Jewish music than this sentence is Magyar language because its writer has great-grandparents from Hungary.

Zorn was asked, on NPR, what exactly it is that makes music Jewish. "Well, you know, I've been doing this for quite a while and I don't think I can honestly answer that question very accurately," he said. "It could be a lot of things. It could be just an intention of it wanted to be that. It could be a scale. It could be some dramatic subject or theme. It could be something historical. It could be something that's just emotional. It could [be] a lot of things. It could be nothing. I don't know." But to identify something or someone as Jewish and then accept "nothing" as a legitimate reason—surely this is in some way to deny the richness, and even the legitimacy, of Jewishness; it is, in its whatever-ism about its own identity, reckless and demeaning to real Jewish culture. Zorn, following up on the Bacharach CD, approached Dave Brubeck with the proposition of honoring his work in the "Great Jewish Music" series, and Brubeck had to tell Zorn that he is not Jewish. Thinking of "Blue Rondo à la Turk" and "Pick Up Sticks," I wonder why Zorn presumed that Brubeck is a Jew. Was it the cantorial part that Brubeck once included in a religious oratorio about social justice? But Brubeck, a Catholic, has also composed a mass. Or was it his nose?

On that last night at Tonic, Zorn headed back to the stage for the second set, and fans once again yelled out to him, "Zorn! Zorn!" Somebody hollered "Shalom!" and Zorn replied, "What it is!" *What it is*? That is a perfectly, bafflingly appropriate salutation for the living master of creative delusion. ◆

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Dr. Esposito is Editor-in-Chief of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, *The Oxford History of Islam*, and *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. He has more than 25 books to his credit. An international consultant, he is Professor of Religion and International Affairs and of Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, Washington, DC. He specializes in Islam, political Islam, and the impact of Islamic movements from North Africa to Southeast Asia.

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Jerry A. Coyne

THE GREAT MUTATOR

THE EDGE OF EVOLUTION: THE SEARCH FOR THE LIMITS OF DARWINISM
By Michael J. Behe
(Free Press, 320 pp., $28)

I.

Browsing the websites of different colleges, a prospective biology student finds an unusual statement on the page of the Department of Biological Sciences at Lehigh University. It begins:

> The faculty in the department of biological sciences is committed to the highest standards of scientific integrity and academic function. This commitment carries with it unwavering support for academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas. It also demands the utmost respect for the scientific method, integrity in the conduct of research, and recognition that the validity of any scientific model comes only as a result of rational hypothesis testing, sound experimentation, and findings that can be replicated by others.

So far, so good. After all, every science department should adhere to rigorous canons of research. But then comes a curious disclaimer:

> The department faculty, then, are unequivocal in their support of evolutionary theory, which has its roots in the seminal work of Charles Darwin and has been supported by findings accumulated over 140 years. The sole dissenter from this position, Prof. Michael Behe, is a well-known proponent of "intelligent design." While we respect Prof. Behe's right to express his views, they are his alone and are in no way endorsed by the department. It is our collective position that intelligent design has no basis in science, has not been tested experimentally, and should not be regarded as scientific.

To my knowledge, such a statement is unique. Biology departments do not customarily assert publicly that they support a theory known for more than a century to be true. This is equivalent to a chemistry faculty announcing that "we are unequivocal in our support of atoms." Yet this disclaimer is perfectly understandable. For in this department resides Michael Behe—that *rara avis*, a genuine biologist who is also an advocate of "intelligent design." And Lehigh University does not wish to lose prospective students who bridle at the thought of studying miracles in their science courses.

Intelligent design, or ID, is a modern form of creationism cleverly constructed to circumvent the many court decisions that have banned, on First Amendment grounds, the teaching of religious views in the science classroom. ID has shed many of the trappings that once cost creationists scientific and legal credibility, including explicit reference to God and the ludicrous idea that the Earth is only about ten thousand years old. Instead, God has been replaced by an unspecified "intelligent designer." Besides making the usual shopworn criticisms of evolutionary theory, IDers contend that some features of life are too complex to have evolved, and so required celestial intervention.

Behe has been an especially valuable ally of the IDers. Not only is he one of the few working scientists in their camp (he is a protein biochemist), thus giving them a smidgen of scientific respectability, but in 1996 he published *Darwin's Black Box*, a popular-science book that has become something of a manifesto for "intelligent design." In that book, Behe updated an old creationist chestnut: the assertion that some aspects of life could not have evolved by means of natural selection, because that evolution would have required untenable steps. Consider the eye, which consists of a number of interacting parts (such as the retina, the optic nerve, the lens, and the cornea) that work together to allow vision. How could such a complex feature have evolved gradually if it could not work unless all its components were already in place? Such features, said Behe, are "irreducibly complex": their evolution supposedly cannot be reduced to a sequential series of adaptive steps, as required by Darwinian natural selection.

Well, scientists already knew that "irreducibly complex" features can indeed be explained by natural selection; and Darwin himself had no trouble doing this for the eye in *On the Origin of Species*, describing a series of perfectly well-adapted living species, each of which had a slightly more advanced version of an eye. Behe's novelty was to extend this argument to complex biochemical pathways, the evolution of many of which we do not yet fully understand. It was in the complexity of metabolism, blood clotting, and immunology that Behe claimed to have found the hand of the Great Designer.

The reviews of *Darwin's Black Box* in the scientific community were uniformly negative, for two reasons. First, we do understand something about how these pathways might have evolved in stepwise fashion, though we are as yet admittedly ignorant of many details. (It is harder to reconstruct the evolution of biochemical pathways than the evolution of organisms themselves, because, unlike organisms, these pathways do not fossilize, and so their evolution must be reconstructed entirely from living species.) Second, in the scientific community a failure to understand something does not automatically count as evidence for divine creation. Science is littered with once-mysterious facts first imputed to God and later found out to be explicable solely through natural processes. This, in fact, is what Darwin's theory of natural selection did to the earlier idea that organisms were designed by a Creator.

More damaging than the scientific criticisms of Behe's work was the review that he got in 2005 from Judge John E. Jones III. After an ID textbook called *Of Pandas and People* was proposed for biology classes at a high school in Dover, Pennsylvania, a group of local parents brought suit against the Dover Area School District and some of its members. There followed a six-week trial in federal court in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, with the plaintiffs supported by the ACLU and a Pennsylvania law firm, and the school district defended by a right-wing Christian law firm. The case of *Kitzmiller et al.* v. *Dover Area School District et al.*, dubbed by some "the Scopes trial of our century," included luminaries from both the scientific camp and the ID camp battling it out in front of Judge Jones. With his scientific credentials, Behe was the key witness for the defense.

Jones's 139-page verdict for the plaintiffs was eloquent, strong, and unequivocal, especially coming from a churchgoing Republican. He ruled that "intelligent design" is not only unscientific, but a doctrine based firmly on religion. Jones called the introduction of the clandestinely cre-

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ationist textbook at Dover High School an act of "breathtaking inanity." He also found Behe's testimony wholly unconvincing, noting that irreducible complexity was not evidence against evolution, and that the biochemical systems touted by Behe were not irreducibly complex anyway. Behe's credibility was damaged also by his admission that ID's definition of science was so loose that it could encompass astrology, and by his fatal assertion that the plausibility of the argument for ID depends upon the extent to which one believes in the existence of God.

But IDers, like all creationists, are never down for the count, because they see themselves as fighting for the Lord. So Behe is back now, with a new book and a brand-new theory that puts the Intelligent Designer back into biology. What has Behe now found to resurrect his campaign for ID? It's rather pathetic, really. Basically, he now admits that almost the entire edifice of evolutionary theory is true: evolution, natural selection, common ancestry. His one novel claim is that the genetic variation that fuels natural selection—mutation—is produced not by random changes in DNA, as evolutionists maintain, but by an Intelligent Designer. That is, he sees God as the Great Mutator.

II.

For a start, let us be clear about what Behe now accepts about evolutionary theory. He has no problem with a 4.5-billion-year-old Earth, nor with evolutionary change over time, nor apparently with its ample documentation through the fossil record—the geographical distribution of organisms, the existence of vestigial traits testifying to ancient ancestry, and the finding of fossil "missing links" that show common ancestry among major groups of organisms. Behe admits that most evolution is caused by natural selection, and that all species share common ancestors. He even accepts the one fact that most other IDers would rather die than admit: that humans shared a common ancestor with chimpanzees and other apes.

Why does Behe come clean about all this? The reason is plain. There is simply too much evidence for any scientist to deny these facts without losing all credibility. "Intelligent design" is desperate for scientific respectability, and you do not get that by fighting facts about which everybody agrees. But with most of evolutionary biology accepted, what's left for a good IDer to contest? Behe finds his bugbear in evolutionary theory's view that "random mutation" provides the raw material for evolutionary change. And to understand his critique, we first have to grasp how mutation fits into evolutionary theory, and what scientists mean when they say that mutations are "random."

If evolution is a car, then natural selection is the engine and mutation is the gas. Although evolutionary change can be driven by several processes, natural selection is almost certainly the main one—and the *only* one that can adapt organisms to their environment, creating the misleading appearance of deliberate design. Yet natural selection, which is simply the preservation of genes that give their possessors greater reproductive success than their competitors, cannot take place without genetic variation. Although Darwin had no idea where this variation came from, we now know that it is produced by mutation—accidental changes in the sequence of DNA that usually occur as copying errors when a molecule replicates during cell division. We also know that mutation-generated variation is pervasive: different forms of genes produced by mutation, for example, explain variation in human eye color, blood types, and much of our—and other species'—variation in height, weight, biochemistry, and innumerable other traits.

Once the variation exists, those genes that enhance an individual's "fitness" are preserved, and those that reduce it are discarded. (Natural selection is not really a "process," but simply a description of the differential and adaptive survival of genes.) The polar bear, for instance, has a white coat (its hairs actually lack pigment but appear white because they reflect light), and since this color is unique among bears, the polar bear presumably evolved from a dark-furred ancestor. The likely scenario is that mutations occurred that produced individuals varying in their coat color. Bears with a lighter coat had an advantage over others, for they would be more camouflaged against the Arctic ice and snow and better at sneaking up on seals. Lighter bears would then outcompete darker ones at getting food and thus produce more offspring, leaving more copies of the "light-coat" genes. Over time, the population of bears would evolve lighter and lighter coats until they were almost invisible against the snow.

TOMASZ WALENTA

On the basis of much evidence, scientists have concluded that mutations occur randomly. The term "random" here has a specific meaning that is often misunderstood, even by biologists. What we mean is that *mutations occur irrespective of whether they would be useful to the organism*. Mutations are simply errors in DNA replication. Most of them are harmful or neutral, but a few of them can turn out to be useful. And there is no known biological mechanism for jacking up the probability that a mutation will meet the current adaptive needs of the organism. Bears adapting to snowy terrain will not enjoy a higher probability of getting mutations producing lighter coats than will bears inhabiting non-snowy terrain.

What we do *not* mean by "random" is that all genes are equally likely to mutate (some are more mutable than others) or that all mutations are equally likely (some types of DNA change are more common than others). It is more accurate, then, to call mutations "indifferent" rather than "random": the chance of a mutation happening is indifferent to whether it would be helpful or harmful. Evolution by selection, then, is a combination of two steps: a "random" (or indifferent) step—mutation—that generates a panoply of genetic variants, both good and bad (in our example, a variety of new coat colors); and then a deterministic step—natural selection—that orders this variation, keeping the good and winnowing the bad (the retention of light-color genes at the expense of dark-color ones).

It is important to clarify these two steps because of the widespread misconception, promoted by creationists, that in evolution "everything happens by chance." Creationists equate the chance that evolution could produce a complex organism to the infinitesimal chance that a hurricane could sweep through a junkyard and randomly assemble the junk into a Boeing 747. But this analogy is specious. Evolution is manifestly not a chance process because of the order produced by natural selection—order that can, over vast periods of time, result in complex organisms looking as if they were designed to fit their environment. Humans, the product of nonrandom natural selection, are the biological equivalent of a 747, and in some ways they are even more complex. The explanation of seeming design by solely materialistic processes was Darwin's greatest achievement, and a major source of discomfort for those holding the view that nature was designed by God.

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III.

In a series of rather disconnected and scientifically dubious arguments, Behe tries to claim that random mutations cannot possibly be the building blocks of evolution. His main argument involves malaria, in particular the evolution of humans to resist infection by malaria, and the evolution of the malaria parasite itself to counteract the evolution of human resistance and the development of anti-malarial drugs.

Malaria actually provides a superb example of natural selection, and its story has some intriguing quirks. The disease is caused by a protozoan carried by mosquitoes, who act as flying syringes that inject the microbe into the human bloodstream. There it takes up residence in the liver and then in the red blood cells, multiplies prolifically, and can ultimately cause anemia, kidney failure, hemorrhage, and death. Residence in red blood cells and the liver is adaptive for the parasites, because in those spots they are hidden from the immune system that usually destroys invading microbes. Yet the human spleen can also detect and destroy circulating parasite-laden cells. To counter this tactic, the malaria parasite secretes proteins that cause its carrier blood cells to stick to the walls of blood vessels, avoiding the spleen (this sticking is what causes hemorrhage).

Here, then, is an arms race between a blood-loving parasite and a human body seeking to destroy it. Yet the story is even more complicated and interesting. In sub-Saharan Africa, where malaria is rampant, a mutation has arisen in the gene producing hemoglobin that helps ward off malaria. The striking thing about this mutation, known as the sickle-cell mutation, is that it somehow reduces the chances of contracting malaria when its carriers have one copy of the gene (like most organisms, we have two copies of every gene, one on each of our two sets of chromosomes), but it causes sickle-cell anemia when the carriers have two copies. In sickle-cell anemia, the red blood cells form clumps because of the altered hemoglobin they carry, causing a syndrome of complications that invariably cause death before adulthood.

Thus we have the unusual situation in which heterozygotes, or individuals carrying both one "normal" and one "mutant" hemoglobin gene, are fitter than homozygous individuals, who carry either two "normal" genes (more susceptible to malaria) or two mutant genes (death from sickle-cell anemia). Evolutionary genetics tells us that in a case such as this one, both forms of the gene will remain in the population, ensuring some protection against malaria but also the continuing production of babies with sickle-cell anemia. Africans would be better off if everyone were a heterozygote, but that is impossible, because the two gene copies separate at reproduction and unite with other copies, necessarily producing some deleterious homozygotes.

This example shows that natural selection does not necessarily produce absolute perfection; it works with whatever mutations arise to create the best possible situation given the available raw material and the constraints of genetics. And finally, although the malaria parasite has been unable to counter-evolve resistance to heterozygotes for the sickle-cell gene, it has evolved, through mutation, resistance to various anti-malarial drugs devised by humans. This resistance has become so strong that some strains of malaria are completely resistant to drugs—yet another example of successful natural selection.

Malaria, then, shows evolution acting on a number of levels. So how can it disprove Darwinian evolution? According to Behe, malaria shows that random mutation is insufficient to explain biological complexity. He disparages the defensive sickle-cell mutation and similar mutations, saying that they "are quintessentially hurtful mutations because they diminish the functioning of the human body" (does successfully resisting malaria really diminish the function of our body?) and that they are "not in the process of joining to build a complex, interactive biochemical system." And although the parasite and the humans are in the process of trying to outwit each other in an evolutionary arms race (including the development of drugs), Behe notes that this arms race has not prompted the evolution of biological complexity. Instead Behe sees the malaria/parasite battle as a mere "trench war of attrition."

In the end, after pages of rather tedious detail about malaria, Behe dismisses the evolutionary aspects of malaria as "chaotic and tangled," which, while showing random mutation and natural selection, are irrelevant to his main concerns: "In this book we are concerned with how machinery [i.e., complex organisms] can be built," he writes. "To build a complex machine many different pieces have to be brought together and fitted to one another." Behe buttresses his conclusion by describing how the AIDS virus evolved to outwit not only the strategies of the human immune system but also powerful anti-viral drugs. Again he sees little evolution of complexity: "HIV has killed millions of people, fended off the human immune system, and become resistant to whatever drug humanity could throw at it. Yet through all that, there have been no significant basic biochemical changes in the virus at all."

In light of evolutionary theory, these conclusions are truly bizarre. No sane evolutionist has ever claimed that an adaptation of a parasite to a host will produce complex biochemical changes. Evolutionary theory predicts only that parasites *will* adapt, not *how* they will adapt. In fact, both the malaria parasite and the HIV virus have undergone sufficient "biochemical change" to make them almost completely adapted to withstand both human drugs and the immune system. And humans have, through the sickle-cell mutation and other changes in hemoglobin, become somewhat resistant to malaria. Beyond that, what does Behe expect? A red blood cell with hands to throttle the parasite? A malaria parasite with a cunning brain to outwit the sickle-cell protein? HIV and malaria are doing pretty well at reproducing themselves—sans new complex systems—in their present environments. That is all evolution can do.

So what if the malaria parasite has not completely outwitted the sickle-cell mutation? No biologist, least among them Darwin, ever claimed that adaptation is always perfect. Every infection by a parasite, every disease, and every species that goes extinct represents a failure to adapt. Sometimes the right mutations do not arise or cannot arise because of the constraints of development; sometimes they do arise, but produce an imperfect adaptation. In his book *The Causes of Evolution*, the British biologist J. B. S. Haldane addressed this problem with tongue in cheek: "A selector of sufficient knowledge and power might perhaps obtain from the genes at present available in the human species a race combining an average intellect equal to that of Shakespeare with the stature of Carnera. But he could not produce a race of angels. For the moral character or for the wings, he would have to await or produce suitable mutations."

By disparaging the malaria system as mere "trench warfare" and characterizing the mutations involved as "not constructive" and causing "broken genes," Behe not only engages in sophistry, but shows an almost willful misunderstanding of Darwinism. Natural selection is not a one-way path to more complex adaptations or organisms. Organisms adapt to whatever environmental challenges they

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face, and those changes could require either small biochemical adjustments (as in the case of malaria), more extensive changes that require complex adaptation (as in the evolution of amphibians from fish), or even the evolution of *less* complexity. The tapeworm, for example, is considerably simpler than its ancestor: it has lost its nervous system, its digestive system, and most of its reproductive system, becoming in effect an absorptive sack of gonads. But it is nevertheless well adapted to its novel intestinal niche, where it can dispense with unnecessary features (its food, for one thing, is predigested). Using malaria and HIV to argue that random mutations cannot fuel the evolution of complexity is like displaying a crudely built footstool to prove that it is impossible to build a house with lumber, hammer, and nails.

IV.

The general reader, at whom *The Edge of Evolution* is aimed, is unlikely to find the scientific holes in its arguments. Behe writes clearly and engagingly, and someone lacking formal training in biochemistry and evolutionary biology may be easily snowed by his rhetoric. The snow falls most heavily when Behe writes about the complex biochemical adaptations of animals, such as the structure and the operation of cilia. Cilia are small, hairlike structures whose rhythmic beating propels microorganisms; they also help move things along in other species (cilia line the fallopian tubes of mammals, for example, where they sweep the egg into the uterus). Each cilium is built from more than two hundred different proteins, including those making up its structure and "motor proteins" that make it move. Moreover, when a cilium is damaged or a new one is built, an equally complex system of intraflagellar transport uses sixteen other proteins to bring new material from out of the cell for repair, rather like a molecular assembly line.

This description is entertaining and instructive, and those unacquainted with molecular biology will be wowed by the elegance of this adaptation. Indeed, such complex features were what lured many of us into biology, hoping to explain their evolution. But the purpose of Behe's exercise, beyond pedagogy, is simply to overwhelm the reader with nature's complexity, hoping to raise the question of how mutation and natural selection could possibly have built such a feature—as if being wowed were the same as being persuaded. As Behe says, "The point is to see how elegant and interdependent the coherent system is—to see how different it is from the broken genes and desperate measures that random mutation routinely involves." ("Broken genes and desperate measures" refers to the simple adaptations of the malaria parasite and its human opponent.) Surely, says Behe, a better theory is that cilia were created by the Intelligent Designer.

In *Darwin's Black Box*, Behe made exactly the same argument to show that a similar structure, the flagellum (a larger cilium that propels microorganisms), could not have evolved by natural selection. But in this case Behe's claim that no intermediate stages could have existed was refuted. Ken Miller, a biologist at Brown University (and an observant Catholic), showed how flagella and cilia could have had their precursors in mechanisms that the cell uses to transport proteins, mechanisms that are co-opted to construct flagella. Indeed, the whole problem of the evolution of cilia was argued before Judge Jones in Harrisburg, who ruled that there was no convincing evidence that evolution could not have produced this structure, making legal doctrine from something biologists already knew. In his new book, however, Behe simply ignores his critics, repeating his bankrupt claim that there is "no Darwinian explanation for the step-by-step origin of the cilium."

If ID were science, we could make an equivalent demand of its advocates. We could ask Behe to produce a complete step-by-step accounting of what God (sorry, the Intelligent Designer) did when He designed the cilia. And of course Behe would not be able to do that—nor does he even try. IDers never produce their own "scientific" explanation of life. They just carp about evolution. And as evolutionists explain one thing after another, IDers simply ignore these successes and move on to the ever-dwindling set of unsolved problems in which they continue to see the hand of God.

Behe's arguments from the gaps in scientific knowledge are fatuous. It is certainly true that we do not yet understand every step in the origin of the cilium, but these are early days. Molecular biology is a very young field, and molecular evolutionary biology is even younger. The way to understand the evolution of cilia is to get to work in the laboratory, not to throw up our hands and cry "design." Perhaps we will never understand every step in the evolution of a complex feature, just as we cannot know everything about the development of human civilization from archaeology. But is the incompleteness of our knowledge a reason to invoke

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God? The history of science shows us that patching the gaps in our knowledge with miracles creates a path that leads only to perpetual ignorance.

V.

Beyond his own incredulity, Behe has two other arguments against the efficacy of mutation and natural selection in creating complex features:

> First, *steps*. The more intermediate evolutionary steps that must be climbed to achieve some biological goal without reaping a net benefit, the more unlikely a Darwinian explanation. Second, *coherence*. A telltale signature of planning is the coherent ordering of steps toward a goal. Random mutation, on the other hand, is incoherent; that is, any given evolutionary step taken by a population of organisms is unlikely to be connected to its predecessor.

These arguments betray a profound, almost willful ignorance of the evolutionary process. It is indeed true that natural selection cannot build any feature in which intermediate steps do not confer a net benefit on the organism. As Darwin wrote in *On the Origin of Species*, "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down. But I can find out no such case." A century and a half later, there is still no such case. Behe certainly fails to make one.

But he does try gamely, claiming that complex interactions between proteins are features that simply could not have evolved. Proteins represent strings of building blocks—amino acids—and the cooperation between some proteins requires that sets of amino acids in one protein interact rather precisely with sets in another. (For example, the two strings of amino acids making up human hemoglobin, the alpha and beta chains, are closely aligned, and work together in a coordinated way to take aboard oxygen and later relinquish it in the right tissues.) Such precise protein-protein interactions, says Behe, could not have been formed by "numerous, successive, slight steps," because such Darwinian evolution would be wildly improbable.

To demonstrate the improbability, Behe does some math. He calculates the probability that such interactions between amino acids could evolve, assuming that a precise set of amino acids is required. Not surprisingly, it turns out that getting by mutation a set of three to four amino acids required for only one protein-protein interaction is very low (mutations in the DNA affect the building blocks of proteins, since DNA codes for a sequence of amino acids). It is especially low because Behe requires all of the three or four mutations needed to create such an interaction to arise simultaneously. Since any one mutation is very rare (on the order of one in a billion in any given generation at a specified DNA site), the chances that a specified group of changes could arise in one fell swoop is unimaginably rare. And this is for only a single pair of interacting proteins. When you consider the thousands of proteins in a cell that interact with others, some with as many as five or six others, evolution looks impossible.

Wrong. If it looks impossible, this is only because of Behe's bizarre and unrealistic assumption that for a protein-protein interaction to evolve, all mutations must occur simultaneously, because the step-by-step path is not adaptive. Yet Behe furnishes no proof, no convincing argument, that interactions cannot evolve gradually. In fact, interactions between proteins, like any complex interaction, were certainly built up step by mutational step, with each change producing an interaction scrutinized by selection and retained if it enhanced an organism's fitness. This process could have begun with weak protein-protein associations that were beneficial to the organism. These were then strengthened gradually, involving more and more amino acids to make the interaction stronger and more specific. At the end, you get what we see today: many proteins interacting strongly and specifically. What seems improbable in a single leap becomes much more likely when it evolves gradually, step by step.

A simple example shows this difference. Suppose a complex adaptation involves twenty parts, represented by twenty dice, each one showing a six. The adaptation is fueled by random mutation, represented by throwing the dice. Behe's way of getting this adaptation requires you to roll all twenty dice simultaneously, waiting until they all come up six (that is, all successful mutations must happen together). The probability of getting this outcome is very low; in fact, if you tossed the dice once per second, it would take about a hundred million years to get the right outcome. But now let us build the adaptation step by step, as evolutionary theory dictates. You start by rolling the first die, and keep rolling it until a six comes up. When it does, you keep that die (a successful first step in the adaptation) and move on to the next one. You toss the second die until it comes up six (the second step), and so on until all twenty dice show a six. On average, this would take about a hundred and twenty rolls, or a total of two minutes at one roll per second. This sequential way of getting twenty sixes is infinitely faster than Behe's method. And this is the way natural selection and mutation really work, not by the ludicrous scenario presented by Behe.

As for Behe's assertion that mutation and selection cannot produce "coherence," it is absurd. Coherence is precisely the product of natural selection working with mutation. Yes, mutations are random in the sense I have described, but to say that an evolutionary step taken by an organism is unconnected to its predecessor completely ignores the fact that during evolution organisms are adapting to something in their environment, and that this adaptation can involve a coherent, coordinated response of many features. Consider the evolution of whales from terrestrial animals, now documented by a superb fossil record. The fossils show a wolf-like creature gradually becoming aquatic, with the hind limbs being reduced and finally lost, the forelimbs transformed into flippers, and the nostrils gradually moving atop the head to form the blowhole. How can anyone say that these changes (which of course look planned at the end) are unconnected or incoherent? They represent a case of natural selection eventually turning a land animal into a well-adapted aquatic one.

Not surprisingly, Behe ignores the fact the evolutionists have indeed determined whether mutations are random. Instead, he asserts that randomness is simply assumed by biologists because "the dominant theory [evolution] requires it." That is, all evolutionists are dupes. But for several decades molecular biologists have tested in the laboratory Behe's assumption of non-randomness: that the probability of a mutation being useful increases when a species is exposed to a new environment. These experiments have all failed. As far as we can see, mutations really are random with respect to the "needs" of the organism. There is no reason to assume otherwise.

To get an idea of the power of truly random mutations coupled with selection, we need only look at the successes of animal and plant breeders over the past few centuries. In that time, they have turned the wolf into breeds as diverse as the greyhound, the dachshund, and the chihuahua, and the wild mustard into cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts. Virtually every fruit, vegetable, and meat that we eat has been drastically remodeled by the artificial selec-

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tion of wild ancestors. All these changes have been immeasurably faster than evolution in the wild, which takes hundreds of thousands to millions of years. And all of these changes have involved selection of random mutations. After all, commercial corn, greyhounds, tomatoes, and turkeys were redesigned by humans, not the Intelligent Designer, and since humans cannot produce miracle mutations, we are limited to selecting whichever ones arise—that is, random ones. To think otherwise would require the extraordinary assumption that the Designer foresaw the intentions of breeders and supplied them with the appropriate miraculous mutations. The success of animal and plant breeding, far outstripping the pace of evolution in nature, is a severe rebuke to Behe's view that evolution cannot work unless God helps it along by producing nonrandom mutations.

VI.

As the philosopher Philip Kitcher shows in his superb new book, *Living With Darwin*, the theory of intelligent design is a mixture of "dead science" and non-science. That is, insofar as ID makes scientific claims (for example, that natural selection cannot produce complexity), those claims not only are wrong, but were proved wrong years ago. And ID is deeply unscientific in its assertion that certain aspects of evolution (mutation, in Behe's case) required supernatural intervention. Behe's attacks on evolutionary theory are once again wrongheaded, but the intellectual situation grows far worse when we see what theory he offers in its place.

The first problem is that Behe's "scientific" ideas are offered to the public in a trade book, and have never gone through the usual process of vetting in peer-reviewed scientific journals. This was also the case with *Darwin's Black Box*. In fact, Behe has never published a paper supporting intelligent design in any scientific journal, despite his assertion in *Darwin's Black Box* that his own discovery of biochemical design "must be ranked as one of the greatest achievements in the history of science," rivaling "those of Newton and Einstein, Lavoisier and Schrödinger, Pasteur, and Darwin." Surely such an important theory deserves a place in the scientific literature! But the reason for the lack of peer review is obvious: Behe's ideas would never pass muster among scientists, despite the fact that anybody who really could disprove Darwinism would win great renown.

So let us put some empirical questions to Behe, since his theory is supposedly scientific. Which features of life were designed, as opposed to evolved? How exactly did the mutations responsible for design come about? Who was the Designer? To what end did the Designer work? If the goal was perfection, why are some features of life (such as our appendix or prostate gland) palpably imperfect?

In response to the question of what exactly was designed, Behe's answer seems to be: pretty much everything, including cells, biochemical systems, and the features distinguishing major groups of organisms, such as wings and warm-bloodedness. Behe's criterion is basically twofold: a feature of life must have been designed if it consists of a "purposeful arrangement of parts" and is composed of at least three parts.

But when we see something that looks designed, how do we know whether that design is "purposeful"? Natural selection displaced divine design precisely because it offered a naturalistic explanation for things that appeared to be purposeful. And why three components? This appears to come from Behe's claim that three amino acids are unlikely to change simultaneously in a protein. Well, that claim is true, but it has nothing to do with protein evolution, much less with the evolution of complex features. As we know from the fossil record, the multiple features of organisms that make them look designed—say, the feathers, legs, and wings of birds—did not appear instantly and simultaneously, but evolved gradually. There is not the slightest connection between the likelihood of three binding sites appearing simultaneously in a protein and the likelihood of three features of an organism evolving. Conflating these issues, and hoping that the reader will not notice, must be a deliberate rhetorical trick on Behe's part, for surely even he is not that ignorant of basic biology.

How did the non-random mutations come about? Well, they were obviously created by the Intelligent Designer. In *Darwin's Black Box*, Behe made the outrageous claim that the Designer might have engineered the first cell to contain *all* the mutations for the evolution of every species that would ever exist. This claim is manifestly false: such a cell would have unmanageably large amounts of DNA, and we see no evidence of "future DNA reserves" in primitive organisms such as bacteria. Behe still raises this possibility in his new book, but he also floats another idea: that mutations might not have been built into the first organism but could have occurred later, foreseen by God. In other words, they were miracles. So you can choose between the two possibilities: either mutations occurred in one big miracle or in millions of little miracles. The first claim is religious and false. The second claim is religious and untestable. Neither claim is scientific.

Who, precisely, was the Designer? Here Behe weasels a bit, as he should given the federal judiciary's dislike of religion in the science classroom. He mentions that the Christian God is only one of several possibilities. But you can bet that it was not Brahma, or the Bushmen's Kaang, or a space alien. As Jones remarked in *Kitzmiller* v. *Dover*: "Consider, to illustrate, that Professor Behe remarkably and unmistakably claims that the *plausibility of the argument for ID depends upon the extent to which one believes in the existence of God*." It is disingenuous of IDers to pretend that the Great Designer is unknown. Intelligent design has deep roots in fundamentalist Christianity, and its advocates are not fooling anyone.

And what were the Designer's goals? This is where Behe really gives away the game. He asserts that the goal was "intelligent life." Of course, what he really means is humans, presumably because Christians (Behe is a Catholic) feel that humans were made in the image of God: "What we sense, as elaborated through modern science's instruments and our reasoning, is that we live in a universe fine-tuned for intelligent life." And elsewhere: "Parts were moving into place over geological time for the subsequent, purposeful, planned emergence of intelligent life."

From God's mouth to Behe's ear! At this point we can simply stop asking whether Behe's theory is scientific, for he provides not the slightest evidence that evolution had *any* goal, much less one of intelligent life. In fact, every form of life on Earth, from humans to ferns to squirrels, can trace its ancestry back to the same single species that lived about three and a half billion years ago. In that sense, all species are equally evolved and equally removed in time from life's origin. Science long ago dispensed with the notion of the *scala natura*: a progressive ladder of life with humans at the top. Rather, each existing species is at the tip of a branch on the tree of life. So what scientific reason can there be for singling out just one species as the Designer's goal? How do we know that the goal was not butterflies or sunflowers? Plainly, Behe is adopting religious dogma as part of his theory. Yet he continues to assert that "I regard design as a completely scientific conclusion."

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And what about the features of organisms that do not look well designed, such as the appendix, the vestigial wings of the kiwi bird, or the vestigial pelvis of whales? In *Darwin's Black Box*, Behe punted and said that the Designer's goals were unknowable: "Features that strike us as odd in a design might have been placed there by the designer for a reason—for artistic reasons, for variety, to show off, for some as-yet-undetected practical purpose, or for some unguessable reason—or they might not." But if we do not know why the Designer did things, how can we possibly know that his goal was intelligent life?

Finally Behe gets to theodicy: why is there pain and evil in the world if the Designer is omnipotent? How come He/She/It allows innocent babies to get sickle-cell anemia? Behe's answer is that "maybe the Designer *isn't* all that beneficent or omnipotent. Science can't answer questions like that." But questions about the goals, the powers, and the limitations of the Designer are precisely what must be answered if ID is to become scientific. After all, we do know something about the power and the limitations of natural selection, a process that can explain pain and things that seem evil.

Is Behe's theory testable? Well, not really, since it consists not of positive assertions, but of criticisms of evolutionary theory and solemn declarations that it is powerless to explain complexity. And it is certainly true that scientists will never be able to give Darwinian explanations for the evolution of everything. The origins of many features, such as the bony plates on the back of the Stegosaurus, are lost in the irrecoverable past. But neither can archaeology unearth everything about ancient history. We do not maintain on these grounds that archaeology is not a science.

Behe waffles when confronted with the testability problem of ID and turns it back on evolutionists, saying that "coming from Darwinists, both objections [the lack of predictions and the untestability of ID] are instances of the pot calling the kettle black." He then waffles even more when implying that ID does not even need to be testable: "Both additional demands—for hard-and-fast predictions or for direct evidence of a theory's fundamental principle—are disingenuous. Philosophers have long known that no simple criterion, including prediction, automatically qualifies or disqualifies something as science, and fundamental entities invoked by a theory can remain mysterious for centuries, or indefinitely."

But who is being disingenuous here? Evolution has been tested, and confirmed, many times over. Every time we find an early human fossil dating back several million years, it confirms evolution. Every time a new transitional fossil is found, such as the recently discovered "missing links" between land animals and whales, it confirms evolution. Each time a bacterial strain becomes resistant to an antibiotic, it confirms evolution. And evolutionary biology makes predictions. Here is one that Darwin himself made: that the earliest human ancestors will be found in Africa. (That prediction was confirmed, of course.) Another was made by Neil Shubin at the University of Chicago: that transitional forms between fish and amphibians would be found in 370-million-year-old rocks. Sure enough, he discovered that there were rocks of that age in Canada, went and looked at them, and found the right fossils. Intelligent design, in contrast, makes no predictions. It is infinitely malleable in the face of counterevidence, cannot be refuted, and is therefore not science.

In the end, *The Edge of Evolution* is not an advance or a refinement of the theory of intelligent design, but a retreat from its original claims—an act of desperation designed to maintain credibility in a world of scientific progress. But it is all for nothing, because Behe's new theory remains the same old mixture of dead science and thinly disguised theology. There is no evidence for his main claim of non-random mutation, and scientists have plenty of evidence against it. His arguments against the Darwinian evolution of complex organisms are flawed and misleading. And there is not a shred of evidence supporting his claim that the goal of evolution is intelligent life. In contrast to the feast of evidence that nourishes evolutionary theory, Behe gives us an empty plate.

The overweening strategy of IDers, and their creationist forebears, is to say that everything that we do not understand is evidence of the existence of God. I can imagine IDers of two centuries ago claiming that God made the sun shine, because until 1938 we had no idea where all that energy came from. It was not until quantum mechanics arrived out of left field that the physicist Hans Bethe was able to surmise, correctly, that the sun is a giant fusion reactor, converting hydrogen atoms into helium and energy. Who knew?

One of the great joys of science is that we never know what will happen next. Who could have guessed twenty years ago that dinosaurs probably became extinct after a giant meteorite collided with Earth and produced a "nuclear winter"? IDers would deprive us of this essential excitement, urging us to stop working when we come up against the hard problems and to ascribe our difficulties to God. They would have us join the herd of the benighted who proclaim so confidently that they have descried the bounds of our knowledge. But this attitude, this philosophy, was anticipated and unmasked by none other than Darwin himself, who was prescient not only about biology, but also about the nature of science: "Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge: it is those who know little, and not those who know much, who so positively assert that this or that problem will never be solved by science." ◆

Sound and Light

All these years and I still don't understand
how it works, how the signal gets through
the bones of my hand, the bricks of this house,
the bank building opposite, and across miles

of suburb and field, pylons and roads,
hills and four rivers to precisely you,
in another city, another house, another room,
hunched by the bath with your phone in your hand,

sobbing. You can't bear to feel so split,
you gasp. Downstairs you hear
a chair scrape, a man's voice.
He laughs, in dialogue with another ghost.

But I understand how light works.
Earlier your back gleamed like a guitar.
The last leaves on the sycamore
flickered like a school of mackerel.

Later I will go out in a leopard-coat of light
without you: just me and the trees baring themselves
for winter, and the marbled paving stones,
and my empty hand shining.

HENRY SHUKMAN

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Mark Lilla

THE PROPHET

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE: A LIFE
By Hugh Brogan
(Yale University Press, 724 pp., $35)

THE BEST PROPHET is the best guesser. So said Hobbes, who was alluding to Cicero, who was quoting some unknown Greek sage. Prophecy first arose in the archaic religions and remained an exclusively religious phenomenon in the West until the eighteenth century, when it transmigrated into political thought. The cause was revolution—not the American Revolution, which was politely received by Enlightenment thinkers confident of steady human progress, but the French Revolution, which brought out the augur in every man. The next half-century became, in the title of Paul Bénichou's memorable study, "*les temps des prophètes*," the time of the prophets. Revolutionary partisans such as the Saint-Simonians heralded the coming of a new industrial order, while Fourierists drew up manically precise blueprints for the passionate phalansteries of the future. On the counter-revolutionary right, Bonald predicted a return to the Mother Church, and Maistre foresaw a bloody apocalypse that would cleanse the European soul of the modern bacillus. And then there was the amusing Felicité de Lamennais, who first thundered against enlightened indifference toward religion and divine right, then thundered against both church and state in the name of a future worker's republic. The best prophets are also flexible.

It is strange to think of Alexis de Tocqueville in this florid company, but that is where he belongs. America's small towns, vast forests, commercial ports, churches, and even prisons were his mountaintop. And when he descended to address the French nation in the introduction to the first tablet of *Democracy in America* (1835), his prophetic voice was inspired. What had he seen? That the principle of equality was the "generating fact" of modern history, and that it was about to produce a "universal leveling" of social life throughout the West. Nothing could stop it, because the fingerprints of God—or some such force—were upon it. "The gradual development of the equality of conditions is therefore a providential fact," he wrote, "having all the principal characteristics of one: it is universal, it is durable, it always escapes human power; all events, like all men, serve its development."

No wonder Tocqueville confessed to feeling "religious terror" when he contemplated the approaching egalitarian tsunami. He was wholly indifferent to the Roman Catholicism in which he had been raised, and his invocation of providence should not be taken as a profession of religious faith. Instead, it reflected rational faith in his "new political science" of modern life, which earns him a place alongside Vico, Hegel, and Marx, the other modern scientific prophets. If we still read Tocqueville to understand ourselves today, when those rival systems lie rusted and disused beneath history's overpass, it is for two principal reasons. The first is that he was simply a much better guesser. The other is that he had such mixed feelings about the tidings he delivered.

Religious prophets are working for the man; even when they call down fire and brimstone, they seem to be enjoying themselves. And secular prophets are also a cheery bunch, since lurking behind their dire predictions is always some magic elixir they are promoting. But it is Tocqueville's serene disinterestedness, his impartiality in viewing the Western prospect, that disarms us. He has some good news and some bad news. Democracy is coming, but it will bring social leveling and atomization with it. This will unlock hidden stores of human potential, but also snuff out the *douceur* of a settled, hierarchical life. People will feel more free and equal, but consequently will be more anxious and "lacking in self-esteem." Fear of the majority will replace the fear of God; love of children will replace respect for parents; newspapers will replace the morning rosary.

And that is if we're lucky, like the Americans. The problem, Tocqueville warned, is that most countries lack America's natural suitability for an egalitarian society: the open landscape, the absence of a landed aristocracy, the ethnic homogeneity, the liberal religion, the new and flexible political institutions. And when the passion for equality is unleashed in a less welcoming environment, as in France under the Old Regime, tyranny will result. And so countries hoping to ease their transition into the inevitably democratic future are advised to consult the manual before trying it at home: "The past no longer illuminates the future, the mind wanders in shadows."

The introduction to *Democracy in America* is something of an embarrassment to the legions of academic appropriators who have measured Tocqueville by the standards of their narrow guilds. The historians complain that he missed some important documents about the early settlers, the sociologists complain that he ignored the class divisions already present in nineteenth-century America, the political theorists complain that his concept of democracy was vague. Yet vagueness is an important prophetic tool, and Tocqueville knew how to use it. To describe democracy as a new spirit moving over the face of the deep, at once an idea, a passion, a new kind of society, a system of government: that is the kind of fruitful ambiguity that sharpens vision and stimulates reflection. Anyone who reads Tocqueville without appreciating the virtues of the augur will be in a poor position to appreciate his achievement.

HUGH BROGAN'S life of Tocqueville is the fruit of more than forty years' labor, and it must have been difficult to write. The appearance of André Jardin's exhaustive French biography in 1984 provided new resources to scholars but made it hard for them to claim originality. What Brogan, an English historian, brings to the task is a deep knowledge of America (his specialty) and a lively pen sharpened by early journalistic experience. He is a splendid writer with an eye for telling examples and dramatic vignettes. Tocqueville's plan to visit America, hatched with his lifelong friend Gustave de Beaumont, appears in a different light when set against the example of his uncle, the grand romantic Chateaubriand, who had visited the United States in 1791 and had just published his own *Voyage en Amérique*, along with his Native American saga, *Les Natchez*.

Unlike American scholars, who tend to focus single-mindedly on the text of *Democracy in America* and perhaps *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, Brogan sets all Tocqueville's writings against the backdrop of his engaged political life as deputy, minister, and fixture of *le tout Paris*. Here we find Tocqueville

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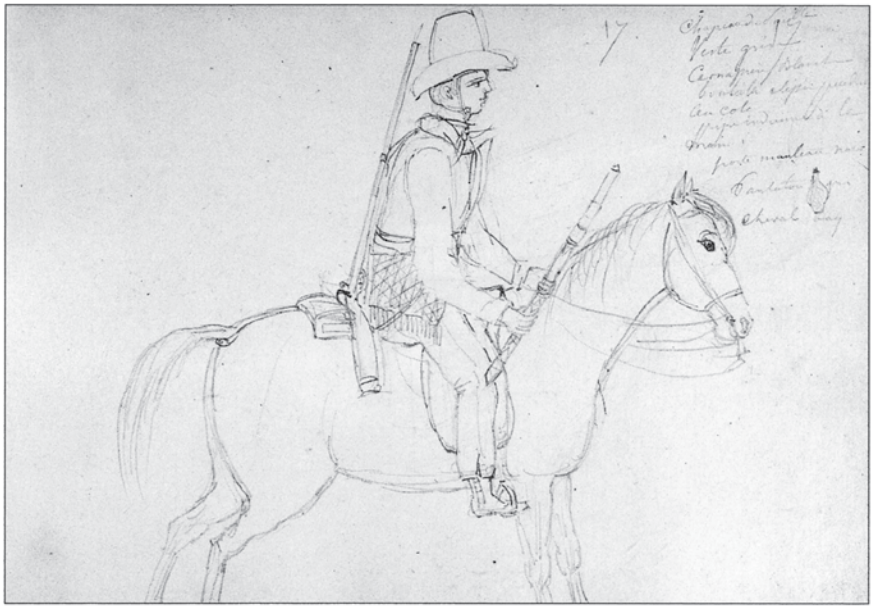
in a police station in June 1848, checking the papers of suspicious characters—among them Alexander Herzen, who was caught in a round-up. We are there when he is arrested and led off to prison during Louis Napoleon's coup d'état in 1851, spending the nights with his fellow parliamentary deputies sitting on the bare floor, eating with their hands, and telling jokes ("The gayest time … that I ever passed"). And we follow him to his painful death from tuberculosis in 1859 at the age of fifty-three, broken and depressed that his great work on the French Revolution would remain unfinished.

The closer Brogan sticks to the ground, describing the ins and outs of French politics or the state of Tocqueville's health, the better his book is. It is when he takes up Tocqueville's ideas, particularly the cascade of ideas gushing out of *Democracy in America*, that the troubles begin. Several reviewers have complained that Brogan does not much like Tocqueville, which may be true but is also beside the point: some of the best lives are written by biographers skeptical of their subjects. No, the real problem is that Brogan just cannot seem to make out what kind of thinker Tocqueville was—the class he belongs to, and to whom he should be compared. There is, tellingly, very little about the French intellectual milieu of Tocqueville's Paris to be found here. The huge divide between radical pro-revolutionary utopians and the principled counter-revolutionary thinkers, which is the intellectual backdrop to all Tocqueville's writings, is never explored. Names like Maistre, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Lamennais, and Comte appear only in passing. We learn virtually nothing about what Tocqueville read or who (apart from François Guizot and John Stuart Mill) his intellectual interlocutors were.

A person relying only on Brogan's book would never guess that there was a fierce battle going on over the Enlightenment legacy, and that liberal thinkers such as Tocqueville were trying to help France adapt to the post-revolutionary situation without succumbing to nostalgia for the world that the Enlightenment had allegedly destroyed, or to fantasies about an ideal society that it would never produce. Madame de Staël's beautiful portrait, hanging in an elegant Parisian salon, gets due mention—but not her political essays, which were genuinely significant. And Tocqueville's extraordinary near-contemporary Benjamin Constant, whose ideas and political stances most closely match Tocqueville's own, is not mentioned at all.

Instead, for reasons known only to himself, Brogan tries to cut Tocqueville down to size by portraying him as a stubborn, narrow-minded product of the dispossessed minor aristocracy. "He was one of a defeated class," Brogan writes, "and could not forget the defeat. He yearned for his birthright." We are repeatedly told that Tocqueville was an elitist, a man incapable of transcending "the cultural limitations of his cradle Catholicism." He was also something of a head case, "neurotically unable to re-read his books," with a "neurotic craving to seem original" (see: kettles, black), and allowed *Democracy in America* to be "shaped as much by personal neurosis as by logic and observation."

The thrust of all this unpersuasive speculation is that Tocqueville was a lousy scholar of his times whose reputation has been inexplicably inflated by later readers, who use his lapidary pronouncements to advance their own political agendas. How, Brogan wonders, can we take seriously a book on America by a tourist in his twenties who made a short trip, spoke to few women, avoided the poor, and wrote about prisons without having read Foucault? As anyone can plainly see, "Delacroix's energetic picture *Liberty Leading the People* is more profoundly wise than anything which Tocqueville wrote on the subject." Anything? This is a biography that only a valet could love.



Sketch of Alexis de Tocqueville by Gustave de Beaumont, 1831

The Old Regime and the Revolution is a work of history, the *Souvenirs* a cunning memoir of revolutionary sublimity and banality. But the key to it all, *Democracy in America*, is an epiphanic work. Little wonder, then, that Tocqueville's reputation has risen and fallen depending on the epiphanies his readers experience as they compare his predictions to their own historical moment. This has nothing to do with inflated reputations, as Brogan seems to think; it is the common lot of prophets. Consider, for example, the unexpected revival of interest in Tocqueville in France over the past quarter-century.

With the weakening of the Third Republic due to World War I, and the subsequent collapse of liberal political thought, Tocqueville, one of France's greatest nineteenth-century thinkers, became the forgotten man. For the next half-century, the French sought out their auguries in Marx and the minor figures who eventually gave us "French theory." Raymond Aron was virtually alone in defending Tocqueville's insights into modern industrial society, but Aron wrote for *Le Figaro*, so he didn't count. It was only with the general turn away from the *marxisant* tradition in the late 1970s that the French started reading Tocqueville seriously again, and with different eyes.

A key figure in preparing this rediscovery, besides Aron, was the anthropologist Louis Dumont, who in 1966, in *Homo Hierarchicus*, his classic study of India, shocked his colleagues by claiming that Tocqueville provided more insight into caste society than structuralism did. But it was actually younger thinkers—those who came of age in the 1980s, after thirty years of uninterrupted economic growth, the birth of a consumer society, the decline of church affiliation and class

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identification, and the relaxation of old social mores—who latched on to Tocqueville, and especially to his concept of "individualism," which seemed to explain more about contemporary life than the collected volumes of Marx and Engels, Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Foucault, *et les autres*. Even the momentous revolution of May 1968 (which Aron, in a rare moment of cluelessness, dismissed as a mere psychodrama) seemed to them a profound expression of modern individualism, not a phase in the old class struggle.

In part, the Tocqueville revival was promoted by political centrists hoping to develop a modern liberal politics for France, free from the legacy of the Revolution. But at a deeper level it was inspired by the collapse of the Marxian prophetic tradition, and by the corollary desire to explore the paradoxes of modernity with the same disinterested impartiality that Tocqueville himself had displayed. Countless French books have now appeared on individualism and religion, individualism and ethics, individualism and the welfare state, individualism and fashion, individualism and sports. (Even the title of the most important French novel of the past decades, Michel Houellebecq's *The Elementary Particles*, tips its hat in Tocqueville's direction.) The historians and thinkers who mattered most during this period—Louis Dumont, François Furet, Marcel Gauchet, Pierre Manent, Pierre Rosanvallon, Gilles Lipovetsky—were troubled by many aspects of the new individualistic age, though they, like Tocqueville, assumed it was a fait accompli.

But was it? That is the question we find ourselves asking today. Though Tocqueville's prophecy was cast in universal terms, its reach did not extend beyond Christendom. When he spoke of *le monde*, he meant the part of it that had been shaped by Christian spirituality and, more recently, by the Protestant ideal community of equal believers standing in an unmediated relation to God. Tocqueville made several trips to Algeria, which he enjoyed, and had brief contact with Native Americans during his famous voyage, but for him, as for most of his contemporaries, these peoples were not part of the same world. So when he speaks in *Democracy in America* about the universal taste for liberty and the even stronger passion for equality, the reader is left to wonder whether he thought this deep political psychology operated outside the West—and, if it did, whether it could ever find expression in democratic life.

If Tocqueville seems less central at the present moment in France and the United States, it is because we need a new prophecy regarding democracy outside the West. Still, one can only hope that when the new prophet arrives, he will have read a little Tocqueville. For in fact there is much in *Democracy in America*—especially in the less-loved first volume—that he would find useful. That is the volume with all the dull early chapters on American geography, the English settlers, feudalism, political parties, and the like. Though dry, these pages force us to think hard about the prospects for democratic life elsewhere.

Take, for example, geography. Tocqueville makes much of the open American landscape and the creative destruction of its forests, which for him mirrored the dynamics of American society. His deeper point, though, was that Americans were unusual in not being particularly invested in sacred places. Here I stand, we seem to say—but I could also stand over there. Most peoples, in most other places, are deeply rooted in their landscape, no matter how rough and unforgiving it may be, because this is where the historic battles were fought, where the miracles happened, where the patriarchs are buried. Apart from nomads, Americans are the most mobile people on earth; we find it hard to understand societies where people drive cars and surf the Web but are willing to die for infertile plots of earth. The prophet will explain this.

He should also have a look at Tocqueville's early chapters on the Anglo-Americans. Tocqueville was neither a racist nor a chauvinist; Brogan tells us that he broke with his trusted aide Gobineau when the latter began publishing his bizarre theories about racial inequality. But Tocqueville did believe that every civilization begins at what he called a *point de départ*, out of which its prejudices, habits, and characteristic passions grow. The American *point de départ* was ethnic-religious: our country was first populated by Puritans, who shared what we today call a common culture, and whose theology wed the spirit of religion to the spirit of liberty. Whether or not Tocqueville was right about Puritanism, the deeper insight concerns the social preconditions of democratic life.

Tocqueville attributed no superior racial characteristics to the Anglo-Saxons (he was French, after all), but he did notice that the potential for toleration implicit in Protestantism could be realized only in a context in which people looked roughly similar, spoke the same language, and cooked the same food—in short, where equality was already a social and psychological fact. Many societies in the past practiced toleration without assuming equality: every group got its own quarter of the city, paid its taxes, and (ideally at least) was left alone. This was multiculturalism, but it was not democratic multiculturalism, which tolerates individuals as individuals. Paradoxically, ethnic and confessional homogeneity may be the historical precondition of democratic multiculturalism, which can later dissolve that homogeneity. Only once the principle of toleration exists as a social fact among similar people can it be conceived as an abstract principle and extended to others.

With a slightly different focus, Hugh Brogan might have used his biography as an occasion to unpack some of these ideas buried in Tocqueville's works and get us thinking about what we can, and cannot, learn from him today. For however prescient he was about the tensions and paradoxes in modern Western democracies, we are in desperate need of fresh ideas for understanding the world beyond our own little island. There is a new spirit moving over the face of the deep, and it is not democratic. This is ideal weather for a prophet who understands that "the past no longer illuminates the future, the mind wanders in shadows." ◆

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Christopher Benfey

VISIBLE MAN

RALPH ELLISON: A BIOGRAPHY
By Arnold Rampersad
(Alfred A.. Knopf, 657 pp., $35)

It is a ritual of American publishing that the distinguished literary dead are exhumed three times. First, unfinished drafts, long buried in the drawer or the hard drive, are rushed into print. Second, an official biography exposes the remaining secrets of the great writer's life. And third, intimate letters are collected and offered to a curious public. In 1999, five years after the death of the African American novelist and essayist Ralph Ellison from pancreatic cancer at the age of eighty-one, his devoted literary executor patched together the fragments of Ellison's second and endlessly delayed novel, called it *Juneteenth*, and ushered it into a brief and anticlimactic shelf life. Now, Arnold Rampersad, the author of well-received chronicles of Langston Hughes and Jackie Robinson and a biographer of remarkable skill, has completed a crushingly revealing life of Ellison, and done it so well that no further such tombstone will be needed. It is only a matter of time before Ellison's letters—lively and nasty, judging from the extracts in Rampersad's biography—will come to light as well. The author of *Invisible Man* is becoming all too visible.

Exposure, as it happens, is the great theme of Ellison's life and work. No passage in his exuberant novel is more memorable than its opening, when the unnamed black narrator (whom Rampersad weirdly insists on calling "Invisible," as he calls Ellison "Ralph") has retreated underground in a "border area" of Harlem. "Now, aware of my invisibility, I live rent-free in a building rented strictly to whites, in a section of the basement that was shut off and forgotten during the nineteenth century." The narrator, a self-styled "thinker-tinker" in the line of Ford, Edison, and Franklin, siphons off electricity from Monopolated Light & Power. "My hole is warm and full of light," he writes. "Yes, *full* of light. I doubt if there is a brighter spot in all New York than this hole of mine, and I do not exclude Broadway. Or the Empire State Building on a photographer's dream night. But that is taking advantage of you. Those two spots are among the darkest of our whole civilization." He lights his lair with 1,369 lights—"not with fluorescent bulbs, but with the older, more-expensive-to-operate kind."

All the flashbulbs went on at once when *Invisible Man* won the National Book Award in 1953, beating out Steinbeck's *East of Eden* and Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. The judges could hardly have been better stacked in Ellison's favor. Saul Bellow, Alfred Kazin, and Irving Howe—all three of whom were eager to deal a blow to the old dispensation—gave him a majority of the five votes, and a trade editor concurred. (Howard Mumford Jones, a Harvard professor and the lone dissenter, voted for Hemingway, who had to settle for the Nobel Prize the following year.) A major work of literature is so unlikely an event under the best of circumstances that it is almost pointless to count the potential obstacles to its creation. And yet it is hard not to feel that the National Book Award was more a curse than a blessing for Ellison, increasing the expectations for a second novel that might top the considerable achievement of the first.

There is a poignant passage in Ellison's fine essay on Charlie Parker, "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz," which appeared ten years into the wait for what he called his "novel-in-progress (very long in progress)." Mulling over the strange spectacle of Parker's efforts to hold it together onstage despite his spiraling descent into drugs and mental instability, Ellison sums up the strange allure of self-exposure:

> While he slowly died (like a man dismembering himself with a dull razor on a spotlighted stage) from the ceaseless conflict from which issued both his art and his destruction, his public reacted as though he were doing much the same thing as those saxophonists who hoot and honk and roll on the floor. In the end he had no private life and his most tragic moments were drained of human significance.

That last sentence—a death sentence—is painfully appropriate for Ellison's own career. For as he achieved increasing exposure on the spotlighted stage, Ellison's imaginative hoard seemed to shrink, like Balzac's wish-granting wild ass's skin, down to nothingness.

Ralph Waldo Ellison was born in 1913 in Oklahoma City. The name, the time, and the place all came to seem auspicious. Ellison's father, who migrated from South Carolina and worked in the building trades in the new land of opportunity of Oklahoma, named his son after Emerson. "After I began to write and work with words," Ellison later reflected, "I came to suspect that he was aware of the suggestive powers of names and of the magic involved in naming." The Armory Show, when modern art first came to America, was held in New York in 1913, introducing Duchamp, Matisse, and Picasso to American artists and writers still in thrall to realism. And Oklahoma, the old Indian Territory that became a state in 1907, was as ethnically diverse as New York City. Part black, part white, and "a wee bit Creek," Ellison tenaciously held on to the mixed strains of his origins.

Ellison was three when his father died in a freak accident: a hundred-pound piece of ice that he was carrying slipped and perforated his stomach. Ellison's mother, who worked as a janitor and hotel maid, could barely support Ellison and his slow-witted brother, and relied on the charity of friends. In addition to church and school, there was another significant institution for the blacks of Oklahoma City: the dance hall. Ellison grew up knowing the innovative jazz guitarist Charlie Christian, a classmate of his brother's, and the gorgeous voice of the local singer Jimmy Rushing; he later wrote movingly about them both. Ralph's own talents as a musician, on trumpet and piano, were recognized early. He hopped freight trains to travel to Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute in Alabama; there he studied composition and played first trumpet in the school orchestra.

Disappointed with the response of the music teachers at Tuskegee, he strayed into literature. "Three novels above all gripped Ralph," Rampersad reports: *Crime and Punishment*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Jude the Obscure*. Extreme mental states are at the heart of all three novels, as well as, in Rampersad's words, "a misunderstood young man, ambitious, tormented, transgressive." Among Ellison's own torments at

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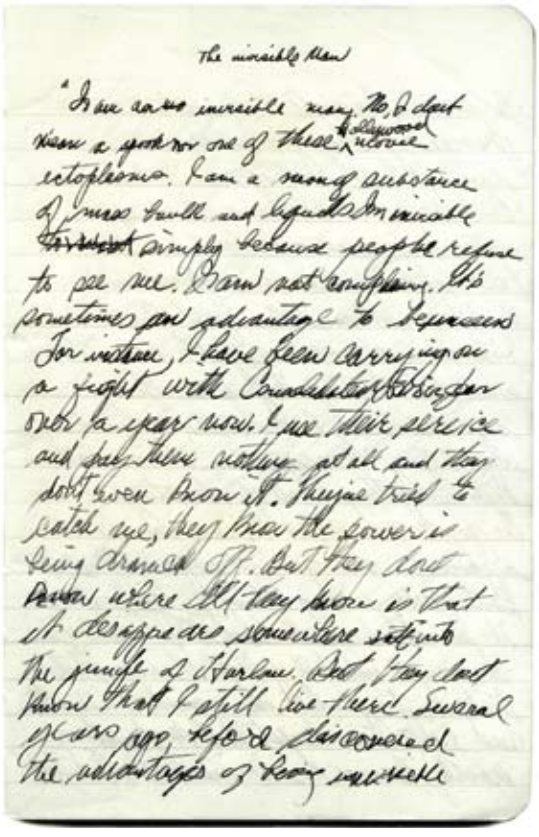
Tuskegee—a school where one found, as he wrote in *Invisible Man*, "shoes shined, minds laced up"—were the unwelcome advances of the dean of men, one of the factors that contributed to his abrupt departure, without a degree, in 1936.

Ellison, who had earlier hoped to go to Juilliard, headed for the Harlem YMCA instead, where, by a stroke of good luck, the poet Langston Hughes also happened to be staying. Hughes gave him a copy of Malraux's *Man's Fate*, generous encouragement, and some personal advice: "Be nice to people and let them pay for meals." Ellison, who had taken art classes at Tuskegee, tracked down the young black sculptor Richmond Barthé, becoming his first pupil and then his roommate in an apartment in Greenwich Village. It was through Barthé that Ellison got a job for five months as a receptionist for the pioneering psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Harry Stack Sullivan, who placed particular emphasis on interpersonal relationships. "Under his quiet questioning I learned to relax and talk quite freely," Ellison wrote, though he suspected "that my real function at lunchtime was to break some of his loneliness."

Hughes, Barthé, and Sullivan were gay. "A curious aspect of Ralph's life that vital fall, given his critical although tolerant attitude to male homosexuality," Rampersad remarks, "was that he was working for a gay or bisexual man and living with one who was openly gay." Rampersad seems confident that Ellison's relations with Sullivan were "almost certainly circumspect," and Ellison himself claimed that Hughes "never once revealed" his homosexuality in his presence. With Barthé, however, of whom Ellison had nothing to say in later life, things "might have been more complicated" and Ellison may have "had something sexual to hide."

If Barthé offered Ellison entry into the gay world of Greenwich Village, Richard Wright introduced him to a different "brotherhood," the term Ellison used for the Communist Party–like institution in *Invisible Man*. It was Wright, a formidable intellectual presence, who steered Ellison toward his first writing assignments with leftist magazines such as *New Challenge* and *New Masses*. Rampersad gives a scrupulous account of Ellison's involvement with the radical left. Though he seems never to have formally joined the Communist Party, Ellison was for a time an avid fellow traveler—his copy of a communist pamphlet is inscribed "Your comrade, Mike Gold"—and he tried unsuccessfully to join the Abraham Lincoln Brigade fighting Franco's forces in Spain. He remained a staunch supporter of the Soviet Union until 1942, when he followed Wright out of the party over its refusal to oppose Jim Crow laws. As his ardor for collective solutions cooled, Ellison adopted a half-joking new motto: "Workers of the world must write."

It was at Wright's urging that Ellison first tried writing fiction, using his experience hopping freight trains to Tuskegee as raw material. The first story he wrote,



The first manuscript page of *Invisible Man*, 1945

heavily indebted to Hemingway and Sherwood Anderson, was called "Hymie's Bull." Narrated by a black hobo, it tells of his terror when "an ofay bum named Hymie from Brooklyn" kills a member of the sadistic railroad security detail (the "bulls"). "Is Hymie Jewish?" Rampersad asks without venturing an answer. "If so, why?" I would think that the answer to the first question is obvious, but not the second—solidarity, perhaps, between black and Jewish victims, but then why the ethnic slur? One of Rampersad's surprising revelations is that Ellison had a comfortable command of Yiddish, having picked it up, apparently, from clients of his mother's in Oklahoma City.

Ellison shared Wright's scorn for most African American intellectuals and cultural leaders, finding in them a "mammy-made provincialism." Rampersad believes this attitude was first liberating and then crippling: "That critical instinct freed him to ascend, without inhibition, the heights of the Euro-American artistic and intellectual tradition (but it may well have been a decisive factor in his eventual decline as an artist, because it took a toll on his imagination and morale)." Ellison found the literary provocation that he needed in Malraux, Dostoevsky's *Notes From Underground*, and Eliot's "The Waste Land." He discerned in Eliot and Joyce, and in the work of the critic Kenneth Burke, a new way to think of the "folk" materials in black life, and how they had served, in Burke's phrase, as "equipment for living" during difficult times.

The blues, Ellison wrote in a review of Wright's *Black Boy*, "is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism." Determined to write something that would appeal to sophisticated readers of all races and nationalities, Ellison wanted to write of the resilience of black experience as somehow representative of American existence as a whole. The transition from feudal life to industrialism, experienced by every black person who had migrated north, including himself, seemed typical—on a more drastic scale—of modern life generally.

It was during the 1940s that Ellison began to formulate his bedrock convictions about race in America, ideas that would undergird both the novel that he planned to write and his mature essays. The first conviction, drawn from his memories of Oklahoma, was that black and white culture were so inextricably intertwined that it was inaccurate to speak of one apart from the other. Giving full honor to his middle name, Ellison persuaded himself that the classic pre–Civil War writers of New England shared this view of the centrality of the fate of blacks in the larger fate of the nation, what Ellison called "the total implication of Negro life in the United States." Ellison had little use for abolitionist writers such as Garrison or Whittier or Stowe; he was after aesthetic power, not just progressive views on race.

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He drew from Melville's ambivalent novella *Benito Cereno* an epigraph for *Invisible Man*: "'You are saved,' cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; 'you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?'" He expected readers to know the Spanish captain's traumatized answer: "The negro."

After the abandonment of Reconstruction, in Ellison's view, writers followed legislators in suppressing the tragic nature of black experience. With a few significant exceptions—Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, William Faulkner—American literature became morally impoverished in its flight from representing a racially mixed society. Hemingway, Ellison's idol turned *bête noire* (or *bête blanche*), had narrowed the moral reach of his fiction by purging it of black experience—Huck without Jim. Hemingway's obsession with bullfighting was, in Ellison's interesting formulation, a displaced response to racial violence in America. "Otherwise he might have studied that ritual of violence closer to home, that ritual in which the sacrifice is that of a human scapegoat, the lynching bee." The challenge for black writers, he argued in a famous exchange with Irving Howe, was not to erect a freestanding black literature, but rather to restore to American literature its moral and cultural "complexity," a favorite word of Ellison's.

All these ideas went into the writing of *Invisible Man*. Everyone knows that the best writing in the book comes in the first two hundred pages, when the narrator introduces himself in his clean, well-lighted place underground, then takes us back to the humiliations of his southwestern childhood, his time in a southern black college modeled on Tuskegee, and the shock of his arrival in New York City. These sections recapitulate Ellison's own trajectory with a hallucinatory admixture of surrealism and dream, while also tracking the epic migration of rural blacks to the northern cities.

The section in which the narrator is asked to drive the visiting white trustee named Norton into the Alabama countryside has an extraordinary tragicomic charge. They encounter a black sharecropper named Trueblood with two women, his wife and his daughter, the latter of whom he has made pregnant. Trueblood explains at ingenious length how this came about: "The gal looks just like the ole lady did when she was young and I first met her, only better lookin'. You know, we gittin' to be a better-lookin' race of people." Norton is so horrified to discover such a fate among the blacks he has sought to lift up that he becomes catatonic. The narrator takes him to a speakeasy ironically called the Golden Day (the title of Lewis Mumford's book on Emerson, Thoreau, and other classic American writers), peopled by shell-shocked vets and whores from New Orleans; things get rapidly worse. In later chapters, the relentless urban imagery of subway and skyscraper, crowds and riots, becomes monotonous, and one ceases to care whether the narrator's allegiances tilt towards the Brotherhood or the Marcus Garvey–like Ras the Destroyer.

Unlike many biographers, Rampersad can do his own literary criticism, and he is an astute reader of *Invisible Man*. He is right that Ellison's terrific essay "Harlem Is Nowhere" is an excellent guide for the novel. That essay, unpublished until 1964, when it was included in Ellison's landmark collection *Shadow and Act*, was originally written to accompany photographs by Gordon Parks, at a time when Ellison himself was doing serious professional work in portrait photography. The essay explores a neighborhood inhabited by people for whom it was possible literally "to step from feudalism into the vortex of industrialism simply by moving across the Mason-Dixon line." While the results of the move could be heartening—"Here a former cotton picker develops the sensitive hands of a surgeon, and men whose grandparents still believe in magic prepare optimistically to become atomic scientists"—they could also be devastating in "a world so fluid and shifting":

> Hence the most surreal fantasies are acted out upon the streets of Harlem; a man ducks in and out of traffic shouting and throwing imaginary grenades that actually exploded during World War I; a boy participates in the rape-robbery of his mother; a man beating his wife in a park uses boxing "science" and observes Marquess of Queensberry rules (no rabbit punching, no blows beneath the belt); two men hold a third while a lesbian slashes him to death with a razor blade....

It is this kind of surrealism of the quotidian that Ellison captured in the best sections of *Invisible Man*. Reading the novel today, one is reminded less of Wright's Dreiser-inspired naturalism than of Céline or Nathanael West. In his essay "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," Ellison commented that the narrator's mode in *Invisible Man* is "confession, not concealment." The polyphonic and oneiric texture of the novel recalls "confessional" poetry such as the "dream songs" of Ellison's fellow Oklahoman and almost exact contemporary John Berryman, which also take their inspiration from a mixture of white and black voices. Despite Ellison's sneering remarks about the Beats ("They have strange problems in bed"), *Invisible Man*—"one long, loud rant, howl and laugh," according to Ellison"—also resembles Allen Ginsberg's long poem "Howl," from 1956, in its attempted fusion of jazz and European intellectual culture.

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Fatherless, without a college degree, and wearing his failure at a second novel like a scarlet letter of shame, Ellison, who stammered when he was nervous, concealed his "almost leprous insecurity" behind a dignified and increasingly pompous façade. He was touchy and testy and quick to take offense, often when none was intended. He left dinner parties in a huff, leaving the puzzled guests to guess at what stray remark had so grievously wounded him. When he drank heavily, which he did often, his suppressed belligerence broke out in frightening ways; he was reputed to carry a knife. "He was ready to fight, to come to blows," wrote his friend Albert Murray. "You really didn't want to mess with Ralph Ellison." Sharing Bellow's decrepit mansion near Bard College in 1961, Ellison was outraged when Bellow allowed as how Ellison's pedigreed black Labrador retriever, Tuckatarby of Tivoli, might be persuaded not to shit on the carpets. Indignant, Ellison complained to John Cheever, who, as Rampersad wryly remarks, "perhaps noted the irony of a black man complaining to a WASP that their friend, a Jew, did not appreciate purity of blood—in a dog."

After the success of *Invisible Man*, Ellison sought elite refuges where he could nourish in safety his own sense of billowing prestige. He spent two years at the American Academy in Rome, where he began forging friendships with Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate—both southerners who had repudiated their former allegiance to segregation but shared his aristocratic sense of the disruptions of the rural American South. Back in New York, he lobbied hard to be accepted into the Century Club, and then

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lobbied just as hard to keep women out of it. During the 1960s, a decade of extraordinary public recognition for Ellison, he served on powerful committees in Washington and had a role in the founding of the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and Public Broadcasting. He was so grateful to another southern white man, Lyndon Johnson, for his patronage that he wrote an admiring essay called "The Myth of the Flawed Southerner." He could never bring himself to oppose the Vietnam War, and sounded a theme familiar to this day: "We have certain responsibilities to the Vietnamese and the structure of power in the world." He supported Johnson's protégé Hubert Humphrey instead of Robert Kennedy. Increasingly the target of militant blacks—he considered Black Power the flipside of white supremacy—he broke down sobbing when he was accused of being an Uncle Tom.

Ellison was lucky in his marriage to a professional woman willing to support him financially and emotionally while his own career was limping along. Fanny McConnell Ellison, trained as an actress and arts administrator, was attractive and articulate and popular with Ellison's white friends. Ellison, who retained a document from the Margaret Sanger Research Bureau testifying that his semen was "normal in every respect," never let her forget her failure to bear him a child. What pleasure he took in other women was in confessing his own often paltry transgressions to his long-suffering wife. The marriage almost foundered when he insisted, after an affair with a younger married woman in Rome, on conveying to Fanny every intimate detail.

What does all this matter if the work was good? From kindred humiliations, transgressions, aristocratic pretensions, and consumption of alcohol, Faulkner wrote novel after great novel. Holed up in Oxford, Mississippi, where his local pomposities had a smaller stage and an audience less eager to expose his personal failings, Faulkner got his work done. Rampersad has written neither an attack nor an apologia, and he weighs the evidence with impressive impartiality. He admires *Invisible Man* and the lyrical essays, and finds virtue in the integrity and the consistency of Ellison's political views, especially his commitment to interracial democracy and his optimism about the resilience of black cultural forms. He makes no effort to defend Ellison's hysterical opposition to bebop and other forms of modern jazz ("castrated and flat … gutless and homo"), his "muted" response to Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, or his stinginess and even outright hostility to younger black writers.

In perhaps his most significant critical judgment of Ellison as a literary figure, Rampersad regards him as finally a regional writer, in the sense in which Twain and Faulkner were rooted in a particular region. Ellison never put down emotional roots in New York; his consistent view remained that "Harlem Is Nowhere." Biting into a buttered yam in a Harlem street, the narrator of *Invisible Man*, overcome by homesickness and "an intense feeling of freedom," has a delirious moment reminiscent of Proust's madeleine: "It was exhilarating. I no longer had to worry about who saw me or about what was proper. To hell with all that."

The further in time and space that Ellison traveled from Oklahoma, the slimmer became his gift. The failure of acknowledgment that he accused white society of inflicting on blacks (the ostensible subject of his second novel) was precisely what he ultimately inflicted on the embarrassments of his own childhood. In his preference for the respect of the wealthy and powerful, he was guilty of a version of white flight; for him, as Toni Morrison wrote, "the gaze of the beholder remained white." In his most luminous passages, he momentarily overcame his own fear of exposure. "And how it carried!" he wrote of Jimmy Rushing's voice on a summer night in Oklahoma City.

> Heard thus, across the dark blocks lined with locust trees, through the night throbbing with the natural aural imagery of the blues, with high-balling trains, departing bells, lonesome guitar chords simmering up from a shack in the alley—it was easy to imagine the voice as setting the pattern to which the instruments of the Blue Devils Orchestra and all the random sounds of night arose, affirming, as it were, some ideal native to the time and to the land. When we were still too young to attend night dances, but yet old enough to gather beneath the corner street lamp on summer evenings, anyone might halt the conversation to exclaim, "Listen, they're raising hell down at Slaughter's Hall," and we'd turn our heads westward to hear Jimmy's voice soar up the hill and down, as pure and as miraculously unhindered by distance and earthbound things as is the body in youthful dreams of flying.

Ellison wanted—oh, how he wanted!—to be that ideal native, and in unhindered passages such as this one, for a fleeting instant, he got his wish. ◆

Robert Alter
THE FLOW

PRELIMINARIES
By S. Yizhar
Translated by Nicholas de Lange
(The Toby Press, 305 pp., $24.95)

S. Yizhar, who died last year as he was about to turn ninety, is the one major Israeli writer who has remained almost unknown outside Israel. The single, somewhat marginal exception involves two stories fraught with political implications, "The Prisoner" and "Hirbet Hizah," which Yizhar wrote during the Israeli War of Independence: the former about the brutal interrogation of a hapless Arab shepherd, the latter about the banishment of Arabs from their village by Israeli troops. These powerful tales have been translated into many languages—including, of course, Arabic—and have predictably been placed in contexts that Yizhar scarcely intended. But the intrinsic difficulties of Yizhar's densely lyric prose and of his slow-paced, associative narrative style have raised a high barrier to translation. Although Israeli readers and critics have for many decades been virtually unanimous in regarding him as the foremost novelist of the Generation of 1948, *Preliminaries* is the first of his novels to appear in English.

Yizhar's career, it must be said, followed a peculiar trajectory. Born Yizhar Smilansky, he was the son of Eastern European immigrants who came to Palestine during the Second Aliyah, at the beginning of the twentieth century. This, and the fact that the Smilanskys were a well-known literary family, make him the Israeli equivalent of *Mayflower* stock. He followed a practice once common among Hebrew and Yiddish writers of using the initial of

Robert Alter's translation of Psalms will be published by W. W. Norton in September.

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his last name before his first as his pen name. (This name was actually given to him at the beginning of his career by the editor and poet Yitzhak Lamdan, perhaps to put distance between him and his father's cousin, the writer Moshe Smilansky.) The revival of Hebrew as a spoken language fully took root only after World War I, so Yizhar, born in 1916, was at the center of the first literary generation of native speakers of modern Hebrew. Since this generation came of age in a baptism of fire, war is understandably the defining experience for most of Yizhar's writing during the 1940s and 1950s.

The newness of the language, with a very old tradition behind it, is paramount to Yizhar's enterprise. His prose embodies an extraordinary degree of linguistic innovation. He invents words from existing Hebrew roots with an Elizabethan zest; he finds abundant ways to make the new Hebrew vernacular literary, while also drawing on the forms and the syntactic strategies of earlier Hebrew writing, both modern and classic. Reading him, one senses a Promethean impulse to refashion the Hebrew language so that it can comprehensively register the world in all its minute particularity—the landscape with its nuances of changing colors and textures and multifarious flora, the fluctuations of thought and sensation in the observing self.

Yizhar had some English models for both his prose style and his narrative technique—Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and perhaps Joyce (though, as is clear in *Preliminaries*, this would for the most part be the Joyce of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* rather than of *Ulysses*). Even more decisive, however, was the precedent of the early Hebrew modernist Uri Nissan Gnessin, who, writing in Russia before World War I without a vernacular Hebrew base, produced four utterly remarkable novellas cast as interior monologues that become the vehicle of a finely nuanced lyricism, in long, serpentine sentences hitherto unknown to the Hebrew language.

It was this radically interiorized narration, often lyrical and associative, that Yizhar brought to perfection in his major novel, *Yemei Ziklag*, or *The Days of Ziklag*, which appeared in 1958—celebrated by many, an object of controversy for some. The novel sprawls over two volumes and 1,143 large, closely printed pages. In English, it would run to nearly 2,000 pages, and so it is scarcely surprising that it has never been translated. The book follows a platoon of Israeli soldiers fighting the Egyptians for the possession of a hill in the Negev over the course of seven days. It impressively conveys, in dialogue and in stream of consciousness, the anxiety and, chiefly, the boredom of warfare, and it raises uncompromising questions about what it is all for, and whether the slogans of Zionism on which these young men have been raised really do justify the sacrifice they are now called on to make. (To further this theme, the familiar literary motif of the binding of Isaac is introduced on the first page and runs through the novel.) Many younger Israeli intellectuals at the time regarded *The Days of Ziklag* as the definitive reckoning for their generation, while some older critics denounced the novel as a betrayal of the national cause.

Yizhar's career as a writer appeared to have come to an end not long after *The Days of Ziklag*. He published a small volume of stories in the early 1960s and then stopped writing fiction altogether. He continued to be publicly and politically engaged in a variety of ways. He was a member of Israel's parliament for seventeen years, many of them as a representative of Mapai, then the dominant party—a role that surely demonstrates how perceptions of him as a disaffected or "subversive" Israeli are off the mark. He lectured on education at the Hebrew University and on Hebrew literature at Tel Aviv University, and over the years he wrote a series of essays arguing for an ethically responsible Zionism, much in the spirit of Martin Buber, whom he admired. Then, to everyone's astonishment, in 1992, at the age of seventy-six, he published *Miqdamot*, or *Preliminaries*, a powerful autobiographical fiction written in the richly lyric style of his earlier work but focusing on the highly individual experience of a child—a striking change from his previous fiction, where the typical subject is the collective experience of a group of young men in battle, with the narrating consciousness located in someone belonging to the group yet standing apart from it.

American readers are likely to think of the analogy of Henry Roth, who after a half-century of silence following the publication in 1934 of *Call It Sleep* began to produce the three volumes of his autobiographical novel *Mercy of a Rude Stream* in the waning years of his life. But the analogy is imperfect, because *Mercy of a Rude Stream*, for all its remarkable moments, seems to a large degree a direct transcription, episode by episode, of Roth's early experience that has been thinly fictionalized, with the names of many people he knew often barely disguised. By contrast, Yizhar's return to novel-writing has nothing of this sense of a sunset gesture by a gifted writer. *Preliminaries* pulsates with imaginative energy. In many respects, it is a more attractive piece of writing than his earlier fiction; and the creative élan it manifests would impel Yizhar to produce another four volumes of fiction before his death.

Preliminaries has now been splendidly translated by Nicholas de Lange, who is constantly resourceful in finding apt English equivalents for Yizhar's evocative prose (and in my spot-checks against the Hebrew also proves to be consistently accurate). The novel is not quite as well served by the introduction written by Dan Miron, one of the leading critics of modern Hebrew literature. His essay is very well informed and includes some keen perceptions, but it is ponderous and imprecise and lengthier than it should be (this is true of almost all of Miron's writing), and at points it exhibits a somewhat uncomfortable relationship with English usage (a "stream of consciousness modality"). Worse, it is somewhat misleading about what Yizhar says in this novel about Zionism.

Is *Preliminaries* in fact "about" Zionism? Miron seems to think that it is, representing the book as an unflinching account of the historical failure of Zionism, "a great prose threnody for the dream that has faded away." There is an element of truth in this contention, but the way Miron insists on the idea comes close to transforming Yizhar's autobiographical fiction into an allegory of the doomed fate of Zionism (allegoresis being a chronic malady of Hebrew criticism); and finally this is not what the novel is about.

To be sure, there are elegiac elements, as well as rapturous ones, in *Preliminaries*. It could not be otherwise. Vast waves of historical changes have swept over the coastal plain of Palestine-Israel where Yizhar spent his early childhood in the years after World War I, and the shining ideals of the Zionist pioneers have not played out as the first settlers had hoped. Shopping malls stand where orange groves once flourished and, still earlier, the less lucrative vineyards that they replaced. The newly built Tel Aviv of modest dwellings surrounded by sand dunes today looks like a Mediterranean version of downtown San Jose. And so, inevitably, Yizhar's novel from time to time strikes chords of lament for a young hopeful world that has utterly vanished. There are also moments, heavily emphasized by Miron, when the consciousness of the young child, captured retrospectively, is made to wonder whether the

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whole project undertaken by Jews to plant themselves in a land from which they had been severed for two millennia was bound to fail: "As though you are suddenly seized by a realization that maybe it was a fundamental mistake. That maybe the land doesn't want us at all, really. Because we came here to make changes that it doesn't want."

Yet what needs to be observed is that the perspective of the novel, in this regard as in others, is not essentially political but existential, or one might even say cosmic. Yizhar does not speak of Palestinians, nor does he sentimentalize them as authentically belonging to the land; he speaks, rather, of the land itself. In the next paragraph, he goes on to invoke God in an unblinking vision of a timeless existence in which any human presence is finally irrelevant: "only she and He, the land and God, she silently turned to Him through all the emptiness and heat and little clouds of dust, and He silently to her through all the torrid, empty skies grey from so much arid light, until the perfect nothingness of the skies above reaches and touches the perfect nothingness of the land beneath, on which there is nothing." Such moments, which abound in the novel, read more like Melville's confrontation with the pitiless splendor of the indifferent cosmos than like a criticism of the Zionist enterprise.

The consciousness of the child repeatedly questions where his place might be—or the place of his family, of his community, and of humanity at large—in the world around him, but that turns out to be the vast world under the aspect of eternity and not just the strip of land on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean over which two peoples will fight bloody war after war:

> You can see … how the faint patchwork of green made by human beings here and there, now and in all generations past, is all rendered of no account by the calm forward movement of the element of earth, on which the whole of history, both written and oral, has not etched the most tenuous trace, and you can see that the earth is just like the sea, including the hard, red earth and the brown plough, and the powdery soil that flies away, and the slightly green here and there, and the smoky at the far edge, they are all like the sea, unchanged and unscathed by human deeds, and like the sea it is whole with its being, needing no justification in respect of the utility or comfort it offers, it simply extends peacefully, and everything it is is there.…

Such expressions of the existentially marginal condition of humanity, which Yizhar clearly means to underscore thematically, are haunting, but they are far from pervasive in the novel. What I think is pervasive is a gorgeous sensuousness of imagination—precisely the quality that slips through the broad grid of allegorical readings—deployed to convey the vivid immediacy with which a sensitive child apprehends the world around him. The opening lines of the novel memorably announce this imaginative mode, like a fanfare announcing mood and theme at the beginning of a musical composition:

> And where was the first place? The very very first? Because the first place, although there is no supporting evidence, was orange, all orange, wholly orange, very orange, totally.
>
> Smooth like the smoothness of silk, and there was also a casual fluttering of rich orange drapes, orange to very orange, and apparently, there is no other logical explanation, there could only have been, perhaps, a lining of a tent, whose inside was very opulent with a rustle of very orange silk and a bellying profusion moving in waves all of it orange beating in soft waves, light orange and dark orange lighting the orange and all the opulence in its response, all totally silky, in that big tent.…

The sentence cascades onward for another page, profusion being the essential characteristic of this style. We soon learn that the observer of the orange tent-cloth is a two-year-old. The language is clearly not that of the child, but belongs to a third-person narrator, implicitly the child now a mature writer, who reconstructs in his own artful language his childhood witnessing of that visual symphony in orange. By and large, this, and not stream of consciousness, is the narrative procedure of the novel: nothing much happens, but there is a superabundance of experience.

This frail, virtually anorexic kid, followed in the novel from his third year to his thirteenth, is above all put forth as a portrait of the artist as a young boy, though Yizhar is careful not to insist on the future vocation in any heavy-handed way. There are a few brief mentions of writing as a calling, but for the most part Yizhar makes this future implicit and persuasive by concretely representing the child's response to the arresting presence of the world that he encounters. And far more frequent than those scary visions of the vast indifference of sky and earth are the child's enchantments with all that impinges on his senses: the contour of a hill, the explosive clattering rush of a passing train, the flickering images of the silent cinema, a choir singing, a donkey peeing, the strange bulbous shapes of the Hebrew letters he cannot yet read. Many of these experiences are epiphanies precisely in the sense given currency by Joyce. Here, for example, is the observation of a sunset that occurs late in the book:

> Somebody could see … how the sun was turned into a big red wheel, shamelessly stripped of all the pallor of its dazzling heat, and a moment later, in all its blazing majesty, it descended beautiful, light and naked into that hollow between the two hills that seemed to have been prepared for it since time immemorial, gradually entering it, into the concavity that opened up to receive it to gather it into its prepared embrace, and a moment later the entire wheel is inside, in that depression between the two hills which enfolds it entirely and it enters it entirely all red and hot and entirely entirely, and then there is a fullness than which nothing is fuller.

The elegant precision of this rendering is quite striking. A certain vulgar reading might see explicit sexual imagery in this sunset (though the solar disk is surely the wrong shape); but the real point is that the enraptured gaze is suffused with erotic intensity in the act of meticulously observing a concrete natural event. The language is ripe, but its emotive use of repetition and its general avoidance of gestures of high style give it a degree of vernacular simplicity that is uncharacteristic of Yizhar's earlier writing, and is beautifully apt for the retrospective articulation of the child's consciousness. This small and weak boy is from time to time scared, as one would expect: when he suffers multiple hornet stings (Miron makes this a virtual allegory of the hostility of the environment and its natives to the Zionist settlers!); when he is lost in a masked crowd during a Purim carnival; when he passes an abandoned building with smashed windows, which looks to him as though some terrible act of violence had been perpetrated on it. Yet the recurrent thread in the novel is the child's constant discovery of the unguessed richness of the world. If the world can make him feel small and helpless and ignored, it more often provides him occasions for rapture, as in the passage just quoted, or as when he first hears a choir singing: "And suddenly there is a world. Suddenly everything. And different from what

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there was before. As though it's opened up and it simply flows." "Flows" is a key word for Yizhar's vision of reality.

At a few points, as I have intimated, the boy links this excited response to the world with the idea that he might have a certain calling to get it all into language. "It's hard to tell everything," the child, still quite young, muses, "and you always think that one day, when I'm big, perhaps, I'll be able to tell it as it ought to be told." Sensing himself hopelessly apart from his peer group in a culture for which the peer group, for better or for worse, was everything, he reflects, "Or it's as though he's only there to watch, from the sidelines, watching, seeing, saying nothing, but writing it down as it were in a notebook that doesn't exist yet." And this impulse to get things down in words is focused and directed after he becomes a reader. Toward the end of the novel, we find him, at the age of twelve, utterly absorbed in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Pickwick Papers* (both, of course, in Hebrew translation): "curling up every evening to read and finding out how beautiful it is to narrate the spate of things that exist correctly and with enjoyment at putting one right color next to another, then taking two steps back and knowing, yes, that's right, that's exactly the way it is."

There is a generic kinship between such passages and the remarkable scene in Amos Oz's *A Tale of Love and Darkness* in which the six-year-old, lying on his back in a courtyard taking in the spectacle of a sunset, senses his future vocation as a writer. Oz, like virtually all the leading figures of his literary generation, is a great admirer of Yizhar, and it is conceivable that *Preliminaries* somehow served as a catalyst for his own imagining of this crucial aspect of his childhood, however different the sensibilities of the two writers. Whatever the case, Yizhar has certainly continued to be important for later Hebrew novelists, even as they cultivated very different styles and pursued other themes.

There is an odd paradox underlying *Preliminaries* that is directly linked to its strength as an autobiographical fiction. It is an intensely local novel, abounding in the social and cultural and material minutiae of Zionist life in Palestine during the 1920s and so also reflecting the course of the Zionist enterprise in this formative era and, implicitly, afterward. But it is at the same time a universal story, in some ways a very familiar story, about a sensitive child, something of a loner, discovering the multifarious world and beginning to glimpse the possibility that someday he might turn it into art. If Yizhar's protagonist chafes at the notion that in his dull provincial surroundings populated by citrus growers nobody will do anything so riveting as to murder an old lady with an axe, the same sentiment could easily occur to a boy growing up in Iowa among cultivators of corn. What is interesting is that though the future novelist is mesmerized by Dostoevsky, it is Dickens to whom he is drawn as a literary ideal:

> anyone who writes should write like Dickens, moving the action along not by hatred but with perceptiveness and indulgence, not reforming the world but passing through it, the sentences not violent and aggressive, not ripping off masks and uncovering crimes, but like here with a musical stream, a flow happy to flow, recounting all the details that it is a pleasure to narrate correctly, everything in movement everything boisterous everything coming more and more and full all the time....

These lines are a wonderful illustration of the inadequacy of the concept of influence as an explanation of a writer's relation to the predecessors he admires. A writer may pick up certain technical devices or stylistic strategies from a predecessor, but what usually happens is that his imagination is fired by the very possibility of compelling literary expression achieved in the work of a writer he has discovered and loves. There is nothing obviously Dickensian about Yizhar's writing. It exhibits nothing of the wild and wonderful metaphorical inventiveness of Dickens, nor of Dickens's wacky and endearing humor, nor of the cozy and sometimes seductive relationship of the Dickensian narrator with his readers. And in fact, some of Yizhar's early stories might well be described as "reforming the world ... ripping off masks and uncovering crimes," although the manner in which they do this is not particularly Dostoevskian. But what Dickens, even in a highly imperfect Hebrew translation, revealed to the twelve-year-old was the magisterial consummation of turning words into music page after page, and of using that music to take in the observed world in all its swirling interplay of variegated details. It is precisely this impulse that drives this late novel of Yizhar's.

Preliminaries is certainly an artistic success story, but in a peculiar way it is a Zionist success story, too. It includes passages of somber brooding about the ominous obstacles that stood in the way of the new settlement of the ancient land, and about the subsequent fate of the founding ideals of Zionism. Yet one aspect of the Zionist enterprise that is poorly understood outside Israel is that all along it has been not only about politics and geostrategic considerations, but also about the creation of a culture. Thus, a few months ago in London, the tiresome Christopher Hitchens was proclaiming to a Jewish audience that Israel was merely a continuation of the Diaspora. He did not explain himself, but what he clearly meant was that if existence in the Diaspora by its very nature involves threats to the physical security of Jews, then Israel is a profoundly diasporic place. This glib little irony entirely ignores the fact that Israel is not just a fortress-state (and it is not even exactly that), but also a place where Jews have created a vibrant culture that is not in the least diasporic.

One key to that culture is the spectacular revival of the Hebrew language, a process that began in eighteenth-century Europe and culminated in the Zionist settlement of Palestine. This revival is not something that was "accomplished" during the 1920s. It is a continuing process in which Yizhar—and after him Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua, Yaakov Shabtai, David Grossman, Meir Shalev, and other prose writers, as well as the great poets of the period—played a vigorous role. The ultimate triumph of *Preliminaries* is its achievement of a fully realized world in the Hebrew language. Yizhar had begun to stretch the syntactic shape and the lexical contours of the language in his early fiction starting in the late 1930s. Returning in this book to his own childhood with the subtle and capacious stylistic instrument he had perfected decades before, he writes with a palpable mimetic exuberance, leading the language into places it had scarcely touched before, with a stream of sentences happy to stream, "a flow happy to flow." It is possible that his magnum opus *The Days of Ziklag* will never see light in translation. It may be the kind of novel that is a searing document of its time, now fifty years distant, rather than a book for the ages. But this late novel stands as an alluring testimony to the abiding satisfaction of embracing the world, with all its dark and bright shadings, in the musical magic of words. ◆

TOMASZ WALENTA

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"IT'S NO WONDER THAT TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION. FICTION HAS TO MAKE SENSE."

— MARK TWAIN

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Addio

Really, the most that can be said of a great film is not that it is like a great book. Film is its own literature; and whereas I understand the comparisons of *The Sopranos* to the masterpieces of the realist novel, and I myself have not been immune to the hyperbolic impulse in praising this magnificent enterprise, it strikes me that the achievement of *The Sopranos* is not so much that it puts you in mind of Balzac or Dickens, but that here on television, for most of a decade, were tales that could stand in the company of Fassbinder, and Kieslowski, and Mike Leigh, and Chabrol. The subtle ramifications of plot and character; the absence of vulgarity (I mean vulgarity in the bad sense) from this painstaking investigation of the most vulgar people on earth; the close braiding of comedy and tragedy, so that neither optimism nor pessimism is ever the last word; the unrelenting maturity of attention that it demands of its viewers: the thing is so good it is almost not American. *The Sopranos* stands as a lasting chastisement of its medium, in that it accomplishes what American television most abhors: an improvement, by means of art, of the American sense of reality. In America, there is no higher service.

Consider only the language. Or more precisely, compare David Chase's dialogue to Aaron Sorkin's dialogue. In Sorkin's shiny nonsense, people speak in repartee, and always find the words they need, and nothing insignificant, nothing tedious, is ever uttered. They talk as nattily as they look. Even their afflictions are oddly high-spirited, as coolness conquers all. There is not an unmordant or unmoralized second in anybody's day. Sorkin's phony people go from portentousness to hipness and back. They are the figments of a disastrously glamorous imagination, the polished puppets of a shallow man's notion of profundity. In *The Sopranos*, by contrast, there is no eloquence, even when there is beauty. Silences abound. These people speak the way people actually speak: they lie, and lie again; they hide; they repair gladly to banalities, and to borrowed words; they struggle for adequacy in communication; they say nothing at all. Their verbal resources are cruelly lacking for their spiritual needs. They cannot say what they mean, or they do not know what they mean. Their obscenities are their tribute to the power of their feelings: the diction of their desperation. When they reach for sophistication, they mangle it. Their metaphors are awkward and homely, as in Tony's climactic soliloquy in his therapist's office about getting off, and staying off, the bus. Yet all this inarticulateness is peculiarly lyrical, and deeply moving. It is also a relief from the talkativeness that passes for thought in fancier places. Words *should* be fought for.

The hobbled and true language of Chase's people is an essential element of his devastating portrait of the dictatorship of ordinary life, of the alternately quickening and deadening influences of the commonplace. (So, too, is his exegetical use of popular music, whose salving effect has never been made clearer. I speak as one who is also inwardly fortified by "Denise" and "Oh Girl," and lifted up by "The Dolphins." And I can almost not forgive the show for leaving me so absurdly affected by "Con Te Partirò.") *The Sopranos* is a searching study of the problem of small horizons. The problem is that they are beautiful and they are crushing. Who does not come from a place that mistakes itself for the universe? All metaphysics is local. If it is possible to have a vision of the Virgin Mary, then it possible to have a vision of the Virgin Mary at the Bada Bing. *The Sopranos* locates the human lot in north Jersey, but the human lot is available everywhere or it is available nowhere. And the gangland *Gemeinschaft* provides the same satisfactions as any *Gemeinschaft*. (And the same hilarity. Meadow: "The state can crush the individual." Tony: "New Jersey?") Yet it provides also the same airlessness: the authenticity of these made communitarians does not exactly leave an impression of radiance. The bitter joke of the show is that these people are repulsive not only for their baseness but also for their provincialism. There is no Archimedean point outside the new Avellino. These are peasants with latte machines. Their insularity, their superstition, their immutability, their self-love: these, too, are human failures, like evil.

Chase and his writers are rightly fascinated by this carnival of finitudes, and the old name for this fascination is humanism. *The Sopranos* allows for judgments, but not for simple ones. The only innocent in the show that I remember (who can forget her?) is Tracee, the young, unsiliconed, and doomed stripper; and the only pure villain, beside whom even that cocksucker Leotardo looks complicated, is Livia Soprano, the demon-mother who sets the saga in motion but is its least explored figure. Otherwise there are no heroes and no villains: there are good people who sometimes do bad things and bad people who sometimes do good things. Everybody loves, everybody hates; everybody has something to lose; everybody has reasons, everybody has wounds. Chase brilliantly captures the mystery of human motivation, the way in which human action is multiply determined, even antithetically determined, by strengths and by weaknesses, which cannot ever be disentangled. (Gloria Trillo, the bipolarity babe, is martyred to this complexity.) In this way he forces you into long spells of sympathy for morons and murderers. His view is dark, but it is not black. Carmela is right to aspire to more and better love, even if *Madame Bovary* is a lovely thing to have in a den. Don't stop believing. It is true that every trust that Chase depicts is drawn into the Soprano corruption—cops, therapists, priests, doctors, lawyers, officials, teachers, writers, and above all wives—but corruption, too, interests him as a human expression. Chase never relieves his people of their responsibility for all this physical and emotional violence: even as he inquires into the experience of depression, he laughs at the alibis of psychology. And in the end he wisely insists upon the invincible on-goingness, the eternal suchness, of the life that was chosen. The door of the diner opens and closes, opens and closes, admitting joy or danger. Now that the show is over, sadness accrues. I console myself with the knowledge that I will never see Janice Soprano again. ◆

Leon Wieseltier

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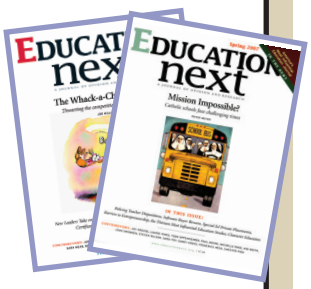

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